

Zen Master Bomun
Teisho #2

Case Twenty
Shōyō Roku
(The Book of Equanimity)

Jizo's "Not Knowing is the Most Intimate" ¹

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.

*Zen Master Bomun: Quite an elegant and subtle koan from the *Shōyō Roku*.*

The *Shōyō Roku*, as you know, is a collection most associated with Soto Zen. And more closely associated with the Rinzai tradition are the 48 cases of the *Mumonkan*, and the 100 cases of the *Hekiganroku*.

I think it goes without saying, but the point seems to be so easily forgotten, that Zen practice originally was not a sectarian practice. It wasn't divided up into different schools, fashions, or clans that were competitive. It was one practice, with different ways of appreciating that one practice. You could say that there were these different doors into the same room, into the same space.

There were these different ways of practicing in the Korean tradition, too. One of the quiet wonderful aspects of Korean practice is that the Soto way and the Rinzai way are not split apart. They are really one practice.

If you look back through our Korean lineage, the Soto way of great faith and great trust, and the Rinzai way of great doubt (or great inquiry, or great curiosity, or great questioning) were not considered to be two separate ways of practice, but two aspects of the same thing.

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

For me, that's a wonderful way of resolving some of the competitiveness that has appeared in Zen -- competitiveness that has appeared probably because it is the nature of human consciousness to be competitive and to compare, and to suffer all the dreadful pain that comes when we do that.

But at least originally we can appreciate the fact that faith, and curiosity and doubt, are not in any way competitive with one another, at war with one another, at some kind of loggerheads. They have not locked horns. They are actually aspects of one thing.

From the perspective of these three qualities -- faith, curiosity, and doubt -- we are reminded that our practice is one of inquiry, of wholesome skepticism, of courage, of perseverance to stay at it so we can explore more and more of the moment. And these are all aspects of one thing, not of an either / or process.

I don't know why this always seems to happen in the human condition. Even the best of friends seems to be prone to it. We start out down the same road and then some misunderstanding or some split happens.

Separation is inevitable. In our practice, too, of course.

We come together and are one with the aliveness of the moment, whatever it may be. We enter into it and there is no inside or outside, no division in those moments of great clarity, of great unity, in the one body, in the identity of the relative and absolute.

But, inevitably, we separate. Inevitably, we step back and gaze upon our experience and the space opens up between subject and object. And if we're not careful in that space all kinds of mischief and all kinds of opinions can come in. And it's quite a problem.

I know, for instance, in Japan, Soto and Rinzai practitioners are quite competitive. Certainly not all of them, certainly not the best of them. But some Rinzai people think Soto people are flat and just sit there like bumps on a log and trust that everything is fine, that all you have to do is ruffle their feathers and they all run for cover.

And Soto people say of Rinzai people that they're holding a koan in the natural mind, or the uncontrived mind; and it's like putting legs on a snake, or adding a head on top of your head. It's already quite wonderful and fine the way it is, so why do you do that?

And so it can go, back and forth, and become sometimes quite contentious and heated. But originally, there's no problem. Sometimes, when we sit it's quiet and we trust that whatever it is that's happening is nothing but the Buddha way and nothing but the manifestation of truth or reality.

And we trust that, whatever is happening to us, we can entertain the possibility that it's happening to a Buddha, or a Bodhisattva, and we practice the practice of being with it as a Bodhisattva would, or as a Buddha would.

So from that kind of *shikantaza* perspective, a great faith or great trust perspective, whatever is alive for you as you sit -- whether it be happy or some fiery place of anger, or

doubt, or regret, or remorse, or shame, or whatever it is that's coming up from the perspective of this way of silent illumination, or faith, or trust -- that is our work as practitioners. To trust that aliveness, if we are able to enter into it fully, is the Way itself.

We trust that it is the activity of a Buddha. We do the best we can to be with it the way a Bodhisattva would be with it. We trust it as the model of practice, as the model of the identity of relative and absolute, the model of "Not knowing is most intimate."

The understanding in the Mahayana and in the Zen tradition of this identity of relative and absolute is the identity of Big Mind in its particular expression -- the identity of 'don't know mind,' or 'empty mind,' or 'vast mind,' or 'clear mind' and its particular manifestation.

The teaching is that the two are one. But it's quite a bit more subtle and difficult to grasp than that, both intellectually and spiritually.

The teaching is that the two -- the relative and the absolute -- are one, but they are in a dynamic relationship of movement, of function. So they are one but never stand still. It's continuous, this activity, this life, whatever we want to call it ... it's a dance. It's not stasis, not a fixed position.

So this trust then, or having trust in this function, is...well, it's alive. Isn't it? And it's shape-shifting, and moving, and morphing, and ghosting all of the time.

Soto is the way of 'quiet illumination.' Before it was called Soto it developed from certain schools in China that emphasized a kind of deep, intimate Vipassana practice of questioning, or curiosity. It is also associated with Rinzai. But really, it's just the practice of a kind of natural unfolding of sustained curiosity. It's sustaining the spirit of inquiry. Suzuki Roshi called it 'beginners mind,' this spirit of inquiry and curiosity. So, in this way, can we in our practice be curious?

I suppose that in itself would be a huge, huge thing right there. Just to be able to go through our peaks and valleys and our changes and our spaces of hopelessness and despair, and our places of great euphoria and beauty, through the shape-shifting of daily life, relationships with friends, husbands, wives, lovers, and colleagues while sustaining some sense of curiosity.

Trust is necessary. And curiosity is necessary. And there's a play between them.

THE GENIUS OF KOAN STUDY

Our koan is quite a lovely koan. This monk Hogen, I mean this monk who was to be Hogen, meets his teacher, Jizo.

He is, as the koan opens, wandering on a pilgrimage. He and some friends are visiting temples, according to this so-called history, or mythology, or folk tale, or archetype. And we, too, are on a pilgrimage, on a journey with some good friends.

Our journey, of course, is through this life. We step into this *sesshin* and we journey into our life in the microcosm of this practice.

Of course, as we sit and breathe we need nothing but the activity of our daily life and the willingness to be with it. To sit with it and enter into it. To be intimate with it. To sit upright in the center of that activity is the way, is our way, this way of zazen.

We could say ‘*shikan*-koan study.’ That is this way of zazen, or self study, the laboratory in which we resolve, work on, and clarify. ‘Resolve’ is a tricky word because it assumes that there's something wrong to begin with and we have to fix it. We use all of these words in a very provisional way, words like “relative” and “absolute”, or self and no-self, or Big Mind and little mind, knowing that there is no such thing as Big Mind, and there is no such thing as little mind. We talk provisionally.

So, Hogen was wandering on a pilgrimage and in our koan study we enter into the koan by identifying the different dramatis personae of the koan. You become one with each one of them, try them on for size, knowing that they are our self, that they are nothing but our life.

That's the beauty and the genius of koan study -- using these metaphoric folk tales to ‘become one with’ as a way of exploring and coming to know self-nature in a deeper and more intimate way.

Zen is the practice of entering into these stories of our selves. Entering into, or coming to know, the stories that we have about ourselves is quite a wonderful way of study. We study in different ways, becoming one with them on the cushion, and then enacting them in our daily lives. And, sometimes, coming to an interview (or *sanzen*), we enact some particular aspect of the koan and we see ourselves in action.

In this story, Hogen is on pilgrimage with some friends and they're wandering and visiting different temples. Actually, they have some agenda in mind. Since they're practitioners, they're investing their lives in study and going to places of practice, meeting with friends who were really working on this matter.

We all sustain and nurture and support ourselves by having sangha friends, or dharma friends we can talk to, who can inform and freshen up our milk.

In these exchanges and dialogs we have with our friends we learn, and we share, and we grow in faith and appreciation and confidence. We also bump into, separate, and do the things we do. We do it in some kind of relationship, don't we? Continually.

Hogen is on a pilgrimage and a storm comes up. And we sit with the weather conditions of the mind, of consciousness, this shape-shifting. Sometimes storms appear as we sit. Lightning flashes. Sometimes heavy rain. Sometimes conditions of dense fog where we have to stop the car because we'll crash if we try to go anywhere. Sometimes skies are wonderful -- 10,000 miles of clear sky! Other times: ice, wind, snow, sleet. All kinds of weather conditions: hot sun, cool evenings.

All kinds of wonderful, wonderful weather conditions of the mind. And, certainly when the weather conditions are difficult and there are storms or dense fog, we take shelter. We take refuge at these times, refuge with good friends. Maybe we take refuge with a cup of hot tea and a warm fire. There are lots of ways to take refuge.

Hogen is on a pilgrimage in stormy weather, being buffeted and blown about and soaked to the skin with pelting rain. And he takes refuge in a temple where some friends are sitting. We, too, have come from a certain storm and difficulty of our life.

And we are, of course, Hogen. And we have all come here to this temple, to this place, this lovely Ashram temple place of practice. And we have taken refuge.

So that's the scene.

WE'RE BOTH TEACHER AND DISCIPLE

We come and we sit down. And of course, Hogen meets his teacher Jizo. Jizo is our own awakened nature. Our small mind is continuously making relationship with something that is bigger and vaster and less conditioned than itself.

And this relationship of refuge and coming together or coming to know is the practice of Zen, the practice of self study. So we come, and we are both Jizo and Hogen to ourselves. We're both teacher and disciple to ourselves.

We have this wonderful capacity that can be clarified with practice to know and to appreciate our love. We have this capacity to know ourselves in appreciation and love when the mind is clear.

Of course, clarity is not a fixed position. There are certainly relative degrees of samadhi and clarity. But when the mind is somewhat clear, we have the capacity to know ourselves and our particular-ness in very, very wonderful, intimate ways.

We have the capacity to be intimate with ourselves. We have to make a relationship with ourselves and all the committee members inside of ourselves each time that we meet them. Or, as we say in Zen -- in shikantaza, shikan-koan practice -- we sit upright in the center of the aliveness of that *one*. Whatever that *one* may be in the moment. (And now we are using the metaphor of subject, of "just like this," of our internal committee members.)

The teaching is that when we can perceive with mindfulness, with a calm abiding and openness of heart -- we touch, and are touched by, something in the moment. This is called self study, or koan study, or shikantaza.

So, a committee member comes before this great capacity to know. We could call it mindfulness, but calling it mindfulness does a disservice to this great wisdom and compassion and love that we have.

We can call it all kinds of things. The Buddha, as you know, likened it to a balance beam. These are seven factors of enlightenment. The fulcrum of the balance beam is mindfulness. On one side are the three grounded qualities of consciousness, of awareness -- concentration and equanimity and serenity. And on the other side are the three enlivened or expansive qualities of mind (these are all aspects of one thing) -- investigation and joy and energy.

When the string of practice, the bow string, is pulled back with some tone, and some resonance, that balance, that tone or creative resonance of the mind, is called an awakened mind, or a clear mind. It has the capacity when it touches or comes to know the particular expression of the moment to know it most intimately.

There is some balance between openness of heart and mind and concentration -- firm, unwavering concentration.

The mind is placed upon its object of awareness, the breath, or the one [koan] word. And it just doesn't move away. We do this unwavering one-pointed concentration and it leads to jhana, absorption samadhi, the unknown.

This tension (tension is not quite the right word but right in the moment I can't think of a better one -- maybe soft spot, as on a tennis racket), this way in which we hold our physical posture with a nice mudra, and a long elegant spine, head ever so gently floating, opening out into the heavens; the sitz bones settling into this earth, rooting down deep into the earth and opening simultaneously, the chest (the sternum in zazen is really nice) rising ever so slightly, the eyes starting to settle down the spine into your belly.

IT REFRESHES ITSELF

With this combination of these seven factors, these qualities of flowering and openness, and at the same time the grounded-ness, the heart starts to break open. And in that quality of pure presence you have the capacity to meet yourself in a way that the self is no longer a problem, you see.

This is the transition, or the transformative practice, of koan study (or self study) in the Zen tradition.

It's quite magnificent, the metaphor of family, or committee members. Some you associate with in enthusiasm and joy and it becomes as much of a problem getting lost in the mist with them as with the ones that are really quite contentious, or ashamed of themselves, or angry, or whatever.

The teaching in this Bodhisattva way is that each one is this aliveness. (And now we're using the metaphor of subject, of "just like this.")

The teaching is extremely clear. It applies to anything. Whether it's the sun, or gazing on a bird, or enjoying a walk. When this mind and cultivating these seven factors of awareness or enlightenment are brought into some kind of balance, and it's not a fixed position, and it's not a state of perfection we strive for outside of ourselves but more a

trust and the cultivation of practice, we bring this presence which are our seven factors of enlightenment into focus.

Then the pilgrim appears. The pilgrim has come in from the storm, dripping wet and trailing mud -- and we meet. There is a meeting. When the mind is in that state of balance and poise and readiness, it can meet something and come to know it. That which was the problem becomes the resolution, becomes the resource.

That's called koan study, or shikantaza, or self-fulfilling samadhi. It regenerates itself. It refreshes itself, it comes to know its particular expression in ever deepening and new wonderful, wonderful ways. This way of knowing and loving and study we call the Bodhisattva way, or self-fulfilling samadhi, or shikantaza, or koan study. (We're speaking now from the position that shikantaza and koan are the same, are one thing -- the aliveness of this moment.)

So, Jizo comes in on pilgrimage, he's come in from the storm. We can enjoy this, each one in our own way. We meet, and Jizo is met, known in mindfulness -- well, more than mindfulness. Mindfulness begins with subject and object, gazing upon something as if it is different, as if there's some safe space that lets us peer at it from a distance without getting our feet wet, or our hands dirty, or ... you get the picture.

There's a movement as we deepen in practice from mindfulness of something as object to what's being talked about in this poem, which is something else. In order to enter this way we cultivate jhana, we cultivate concentration, we cultivate calm abiding. Not for its own sake. Not because we want to hide out in emptiness, or just be done with it all. But in order to participate in more of life, to appreciate (an understated Zen word) more, and more of life in its varied expressions.

Now, this is where Jizo comes in, where Jizo and Hogen meet. This is the entry point. What is it that Jizo says? When Hogen says, "I don't know, " Jizo says, "Not knowing is most intimate."

We hear the words "not knowing" now and they kind of bounce off us. We fall asleep because we tend to make practice intellectual or theoretical." So he says, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, keep it on your mind, everything will be fine." Only the tendency is to fall back to sleep. We all do that. We all institutionalize ourselves continually, that's the nature of human life.

Not that everyone does it. Some people do it and other people don't do it. But the nature of human life is that there's a tension between safety and wildness, or aliveness. And often times I trade for safety. As well we should. You know, it's a wild and hairy place out there.

But when we get too comfy and we get too cozy in our relationship and our marriage it becomes institutionalized, it becomes a caricature of itself, it becomes dead, and we become bored. Then we become cynical and sarcastic and frightened of people who are alive. A kind of spiritual cynicism sets in with, "Oh, yeah, been there, seen that, done that. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, sure thing. I'll hear another Dharma talk. Whatever ..."

But it is possible to have it, to grow in appreciation. That's why we come here. We want to support and nourish and appreciate more and more of life. When you boil it down what is most important to you, bottom line?

It's life, isn't it?

IT'S NOT OTHER-THAN

This wonderful bright formless thing that is happening. The shape-shifting, moving and manifesting ... as flower and tree and wind and sun, and lizard ... shape-shifting and morphing all of the time.

This isn't an intellectual thing, you hold your breath for 30 seconds and a great sense of suspense arises, doesn't it? At first it's, "Well gee, it's getting a little close in here." Then, if you hold it longer, or you go under water, or you try holding your breath for a minute ... It's not a bad practice when you sit.

Sometimes just, "All right. I'm going to freshen up a little bit. Put on some clean clothes, hold my breath for a minute or two." And it get's closer and closer as a sense of suspense builds up, right?

You want to breathe, you want to suck in the pure formless wonderful life more than anything in the world, don't you? You want to know the Dharma, you want to know the Dharmakāya body.

You want to have it nourish every cell in your body and all of your blood and your bones. You just want it to pour through you. Then, at some point after holding your breath -- you receive. The suspense is broken.

Since that formless thing is our life that is most precious, the teaching is it's not *out there*, you see? It's not other-than. And it's not out there.

So then this life is manifesting as this life, you see? Now that changes the perspective from one of defense, and righteousness, and narcissistic entitlement, to gratitude. That's called the Bodhisattva way. That's where it starts to turn around. That turning over of consciousness is a foundation of this Bodhisattva way.

When it starts to turn in that way things are met from the perspective of how all of life is regenerating and supporting itself. The whole kit and caboodle is totally supporting you, right? And relatively speaking, I give almost nothing for what I get. I am supported by wind and rain and sun and plants and motor vehicles and petroleum -- just list it out. All is being given, given, given. And I sort of... "Yeah, not bad. Wish I had a little more. Whatever."

But this is the turning around to gratitude and the tuning around. This is just a beginning, but also a nice place to pause and practice the principles, if you have this as a focus of your practice. And most of us have, because there's some big oars in the water, been practicing for a long time.

But, if you're like me, you forget all the time. You become identified with... "How am I?" "How was I?" "Will I?" And it's endless, the relentless practice of the "I am" self.

I need to practice, and come back, and then remember what I am. If you can, as we go through our journey in changes, peaks and valleys, if you can -- have some moments of clarifying the process of shikantaza, self study, Vipassana, whatever words you are comfortable with.

The seven factors of enlightenment, the content of wisdom, is samadhi -- the relationship between jhana and wisdom and love and some kind of encounter. If you can see it, then you have a very clear compass direction for your practice. You will be enormously invigorated and you'll have some little taste, or very, very clear piece of how this works, this way of self-fulfilling samadhi.

And then you're *really* on.

May be hard, may be difficult. But the direction is clear and we're on the plane, as they say. This plane is going to Tallahassee. If you don't want to go to Tallahassee you don't want to be on this plane.

So, 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 himself.

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