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INNER TRUTH - TANKS AND PEARS

This text addresses some of the most fundamental and delicate religious issues.

Therefore, it should be read, quoted and analysed in a mindful way.

Teisho by John Tarrant, Roshi  
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Sometimes it is good to ask ourselves "What is the most important thing?" I think the most important thing is the sense of inner truth, the knowledge that when you begin to set things right at the centre, you can then trust that other things will fall into harmony. When we set things right at the centre, our hearts are at ease, and we may leave the rest to the Tao. And if things are not right at the centre, somehow they don't go well at the periphery.

In one of his novels, Milan Kundera has a young Czech man talking about his point of view and his mother's point of view. He is always very focussed on the tanks coming over the central European horizon, as they always are, and endlessly concerned with this and involved with the great events, with his friends. And his mother is always focussed on the bowl of pears on the kitchen table. And from her point of view, tanks are small insect-like things crawling far off, way behind these enormous pears, not relevant to her deep and intimate concerns. After many years of scorning his mother as an ignorant peasant, this man was beginning to see, he said, her point of view. In a sense this is what we do in zazen. We attend very closely to the pears. And I think the idea of garden produce is a very appropriate metaphor. Another image I have for zazen is of a garden, that we make a garden. At least initially we make a medieval walled garden, hortus conclusus, I think, that has a fountain at the centre, that energy that comes out of the centre of the universe and various other things, usually a unicorn or a maiden. Perhaps a lamb.

Zazen is rather like this, I think. Attention to the garden is the important thing and we do it for its own sake and there the spiritual life flourishes. We can't really measure what we get from the garden, although if we do attend to it, our lives will change for the better in subtle ways and even the lives of those around us will change for the better in subtle ways, especially if we are not trying to get them to change. And in this garden our desire, which is so ragged, always diffused and scattered all over the earth, wanting so many things, begins to become focussed.

It is said that all love is the love of the way and this is true, and in

the garden this becomes obvious, that all the things we wanted were really this one thing. Our love is for our true home and also I think for the journey home, which is itself precious. And this is why we meditate, out of that great love and desire, and the meditation channels and deepens the desire. And we begin to understand that the object of desire and the desire itself and the one who desires are one. The three wheels, as they say in Buddhism, are pure. There is no difference between the desiring one and Tao itself.

So, especially in difficult times when the tanks are on the horizon, it is good not to neglect the pear and the garden. This will not always help with the tanks. One famous Zen teacher, Yen-t'ou, was run through by barbarians while sitting in zazen in his temple, a long time ago. But in a sense he is still teaching. He was willing to be run through by barbarians. It helps with the most important thing, the inner truth.

Inner truth happens to be the name of one of the hexagrams in the I Ching, number sixty one. And a couple of the notes on this situation are relevant here. "The wind blows over the lake and stirs the surface of the water. The visible effects of the invisible manifest themselves. This indicates a heart free of prejudice and therefore open to truth." The character for truth used in this hexagram is the picture of a bird's foot over a fledgling, and suggests the idea of brooding.

I have, in a casual sort of way, begun to collect images for zazen that people give me in dokusan. I've had the image of zazen as a lover's arms, and I just gave you the one of zazen as a garden. And there is the image of zazen as a mother holding you, or sitting on the nest, hatching the egg, brooding. So in a sense we do have a way of brooding over and nurturing the truth within us, and there is something patient and full about this process. We know in time it will come to fruition and we just have to keep that brooding process going.

Ramana Maharshi was an Indian teacher, who died about forty years ago, who had a very clear sense of inner truth. "The ultimate truth is so simple", he says, "it is nothing more than being in the pristine state. That is all that needs to be said." However, he went on: "All religions have come into existence because people want something elaborate, attractive and puzzling. Each religion is complex and each sect in each religion has both its adherents and its antagonists. For example, an ordinary Christian won't be satisfied unless he is told God is somewhere in the far off heavens, not to be reached by us unaided. Christ alone knew humans, Christ alone can guide us. Worship Christ and be saved. If he is told the simple truth that the Kingdom of Heaven is within you, he is not satisfied and will weave complex and far-fetched meanings into it." He said, "Only mature minds can grasp the simple truth in all its nakedness." So he emphasises the simplicity of the inner truth so that when we overshoot, it's nearly always because we are looking further than our noses.

Another aspect is the playfulness of the inner truth. I think of a friend of mine who died recently. This story requires another little story before I tell it. Many of you know the altar figure at Koko An is a Bodhidharma looking very fierce, sitting in an old Chinese-style chair giving teisho, and it's a precious antique. Soen Nakagawa

Roshi and Aitken Roshi once walked by it in an antique store window, and Soen Roshi said, "Why don't you buy that for the temple you will have?" Aitken Roshi had no idea at all about having a temple and he thought this was kind of crazy, but he loved Soen Roshi and bought the Bodhidharma. And, lo and behold, eventually a temple came, following this representative of inner truth.

Well, perhaps the first time I was ever Tanto in a sesshin at Koko An, and responsible for the dojo, before I understood that the dojo has its own evolution and development and is responsible for itself, I came downstairs one morning about four a.m. and found this tall, gaunt, elderly, very senior student, far more mature than me in his practice. He had had a stroke and was difficult to communicate with because if he didn't want to hear you, he would pretend he hadn't. And he was carrying Bodhidharma in his chair out the door of the dojo into the morning mist and drizzle. At first I was not sure if I had awoken but then I realised I had, and I looked at him and he had a beatific smile on his face, so I asked, "Where are you going? " It seemed the most appropriate question. And he looked at me as if there was something strange about me and he said, "I am taking him for a walk in the garden."

And so that very simple truth he had seen, that inside and outside had become one, that Bodhidharma needed a breath of fresh air and to smell the flowers and to be taken out. Very lovely. So that little apparently-walled garden that we start out with when we are always coming back to the koan and keeping other thoughts out, eventually expands to include the whole universe. A friend recently wrote to tell me that this Bodhidharma-carrying Bodhisattva had died. His health had always been bad. He just said it was a lemon, his body was a lemon. He said that he was waiting to turn it in. And he said it had been one of his great teachers. And my friend, who was also at that sesshin said, "Now he is gone out into the garden and he won't come back."

So I always think of him and his statue and that playfulness. If you have the high walls around the garden, you really can have the unicorns inside. I think the high walls are things like sitting still in zazen and coming back to the koan. And this apparent rigidity allows this great freedom and spontaneous power. Gary Snyder once said "In a sesshin everybody looks alike but inside they're all different. Outside everybody looks different but inside they're all alike."

Another friend of mine who died late last year is also with me. His name was Issan he he was a Zen priest and ran a small interesting zendo in San Francisco in the gay district and he had been dying for quite some time of AIDS. Both these stories are about people who have died, but I think in both cases it felt to me it was in the Tao that they died, it was somehow okay as well as sad. When it became clear that Issan really was dying this time, because there had been a few false alarms, there was a big Zen gathering and he handed over the abbotship of his temple to one of his close friends, another priest, and everybody came to say goodbye to him. They put on their flowery robes and things. One of his fellow priests helped him to the bathroom. Issan was very weak and thin at that time. His friend helped him back and was half-carrying the frail body of his old Dharma friend he loved when he became overwhelmed by his feeling and his sorrow and his love and said,

"I'll miss you, Issan." And Issan, in his measured way, looked at him. Issan had enormous eyes and he would look at you and you would fall into them, and he looked at his friend with his large eyes and said, "I'll miss you too. Where are you going?" HE wasn't going anywhere, he was just going to die. And a few days later, he did.

So it's important not to slight the difficult times. Even in the garden we're allowed to have difficult times. From the point of view of inner truth, the difficult times can be very important and it's good in difficult times to hold up your light even if it seems small, and to touch the light, especially if it seems small and sometimes that is all we can do and that is okay.

Ramakrishna, another Hindu teacher, said "People weep rivers of tears because they do not have a child or cannot get money, but who sheds a teardrop because he has not seen God?" A very deep reason to grieve.

But it is not just that in difficult times it is important to hold up our light. Difficult times themselves hold the light. The difficulties really do turn to gold if they are sincerely undergone. There is something - the light is there within the pains of the way, not after they are all over.

Rilke wrote a version of his tenth Dueno Elegy and then scrapped it, but the scrapped version is also very interesting and here is Steven Mitchell's translation of a few lines of it:

How dear you will be to me then, you nights of anguish.  
Why didn't I kneel more deeply to accept you, inconsolable sisters,  
And surrendering, lose myself in your loosened hair?  
How we squander our hours of pain,  
How we gaze beyond them into the bitter duration  
To see if they have an end.  
Though they are really seasons of us,  
Our winter enduring foliage, ponds, meadows, our inborne landscape,  
Where birds and reed-dwelling creatures are at home.

The pains of zazen and of the Way are just the winter and without winter, what kind of summer could we have? In one of Shakespeare's plays, he has a line, "How sweet it is to talk about old suffering," but it's different from that, I think. That is true but there's something more than that here. It is that the sufferings of the Way and the joys of the Way are not clearly distinguishable from each other. Everything becomes precious, everything is golden, each smallest thing is marvellous and the suffering brings us to live in the ordinariness and to find in the ordinariness the greatness of the Way. Much of our suffering is because we are trying to stumble past the ordinariness to get into what is really important, but it is always there in front of us. The great encounter of zazen is with the marvellous but we find that the marvellous is within the ordinary and the ordinary within the miraculous. We become transparent and the world shines through.

Yun-chu constructed a hut on San Feng Mountain. He passed ten days there without coming to the meal hall. Master Tung-shan sent for him and asked, "Why have't you come for meals these past few days?" A bit of a busybody, looking into it all. "Because regularly every day heavenly spirits bring me food," replied Yun-chu. The

Master said, "Until now I thought you were an exceptional person but still you are concerned with such matters. Come to my place late tonight." Later that evening, when Yun-chu went to Tung-shan's room, the Master called out, "Master Yun-chu!" When Yun-chu replied, the Master said, "Don't think of good, don't think of evil. What is it?" Yun-chu returned to his hut and peacefully took up his meditation. From then on, the heavenly spirits were completely unable to find him. And after three days they ceased appearing, so he too was released into coming down and eating supper, into the truly human realm. And in that truly human realm, what do we have? When we do not ask the angels to do it for us, what do we have? We have our own work, and even the struggle for enlightenment, perhaps especially the struggle for enlightenment is part of the truly human realm. Ramana Maharshi says, "If the mind is happy, not only the body but the whole world will be happy." It is like Hsueh-feng saying, "Today the village of Tortoise Mountain became enlightened." So it is important to find out how to be happy for ourselves. Ramana Maharshi also said, "Wanting to reform the world without discovering your true self is like trying to cover the whole world with leather to avoid the pain of walking on stones and thorns. It is simpler to wear shoes."

The judgement for the hexagram of inner truth is rather interesting. It says, "Inner truth, pigs and fishes, good fortune. It furthers one to cross the great water." So, inner truth is a great undertaking and is the only condition suitable for great undertakings, the only referant that is reliable for great undertakings. But "pigs and fishes," what on earth does that mean? Well, the Wilhelm-Baynes translation which I use says, "Pigs and fishes are the least intelligent of animals and therefore difficult to influence. The force of inner truth must grow great indeed before it can extend to such creatures. In dealing with persons as intractable and difficult to influence as a pig or a fish, in other words, people like ourselves, the whole secret depends on finding the right way of approach. One must rid oneself of all prejudice and let the psyche of the other person act on one without restraint. Then one will establish contact and understand that person. When a door has thus been opened, the force of truth will influence that person." He is really talking about the only way of connecting, not only of teaching, but I think the way of loving. He said, "Even the most dangerous things can be undertaken in such a way. "

In the sangha, the bonds that develop come from this openness. Sanghas are very good at bringing up the wonderful free creative parts of ourselves but they also bring up the pig and the fish pretty often as well. In Zen communities, these aspects come up and from one point of view, this intractable stubbornness is a great nuisance but from another, it's a wonderful place to practice, very acute and powerful place to practice.

The I Ching says, "It's important to understand the force of inner truth. This force is not identical with secret bonds or simple intimacy. Close ties may exist among thieves. It is true that such a bond acts as a force but it does not bring good fortune." He is talking about deals and collusion here, or the book is. "All association on the basis merely of common interest holds up only to a certain point; when the community of interest ceases, the holding together also ceases and the closest friendship may change into hate. Only when the bond is based on what is right and on

steadfastness will it remain so firm that it triumphs over everything." I think this is very clear and lovely. It is not the kind of connection that we think will bring us advantage that is the important one. It is the same in our inner life, we are in negotiation with our own pigs and fishes. If we are to be serious about the Way, we always have to do this negotiation. Some parts of ourselves are so difficult and never really want to cooperate. The harder we do zazen, the more we lose our temper, that sort of thing. We must not have too much prejudice about this. "We must open the psyche to the other," it says, "and let it act upon us."

We must not think we already know who we are and where we are going and then the great Way will open to us and the right Way will be clear. It will not be just a pre-existing prejudice. Often when we think of the right way, it is in what Flaubert used to call "received ideas", with a curl of his lip. It is just something that we have never examined and do not own in our hearts. But when we do walk the right way, we'll find it is generous; the images of the wind over the lake, the image of inner truth. "Thus the superior person discusses criminal cases in order to delay executions." I hadn't thought of the benefits of law taking so long. "But the superior person tries to penetrate people's minds with understanding," says the I-Ching, "in order to gain a sympathetic appreciation of their circumstances. The deep understanding that knows how to pardon is considered the highest form of justice and this springs not from weakness but from clarity."

Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish teacher who lived about two thousand years ago, said "When a righteous person searches for the nature of all things, an admirable discovery is made. Everything is God's grace. Every being in the world and the world itself manifests the blessing and the generosity of God." I think the bond between us in the Sangha are very important. The inner truth hexagram also has something about kindred spirit here. It is the second moving line: "A crane calling in the shade, its young answers it. I have a good goblet, I will share it with you." This refers to the involuntary influence of a person's inner being upon persons of kindred spirit. "The crane need not show itself on a high hill, it can be quite hidden when it sounds its call, yet its young will hear its note, will recognise it and give answer. Where there is a joyous mood, there is a friend who will appear to enjoy a glass of wine. This is the echo awakened in people through spiritual attraction. Whenever a feeling is voiced with truth and frankness, whenever a deed is a clear expression of sentiment, a mysterious and far-reaching influence is exerted. At first it acts on those who are inwardly receptive but the circle grows larger and larger. The root of all influence lies in one's own inner being. Given true and vigorous expression in word and deed, its effect is great but the effect is the reflection of something that emanates from one's own heart. Any deliberate intention of an effect would only destroy the possibility of producing it." This the way of zazen. We are not trying to bring anything about. We are just following the way of the inner truth.

Huang Po, who was the teacher of the great Lin-chi said, "This pure mind which is the source of all things shines forever with the radiance of its own perfection. Most people are not aware of it and think that the mind just sees, hears, feels and knows and that's all it is. They don't perceive the radiance of the source. If they could eliminate their conceptual thinking, the source would appear like the sun rising through the empty sky and illuminating the

universe. "

So here we are in the midst of that radiance in eternal sesshin. I think we all know how beautiful zazen can be by now, as well as how difficult. I should like you in your zazen not only to raise up the love of the Way and to keep trying to keep it alive, keep the possibility of change and more opening there. But also to allow that sense of play and lightness that is so characteristic of zazen, that "wandering out into the garden" quality. It is not necessary to be clenched and grim. We are in a place where we can trust our own hearts. All we need to do is to bring our attention to bear and the Tao will naturally carry you, will align with you, will open of itself, and then, as Huang Po says, "The sun will rise."

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