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INSIDE IS LIKE BREAD FOR LIFE

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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There was a great old Chinese student called Yuan-wu who compiled the
earliest
and perhaps the best known of the koan collections called the Blue Cliff
Record.

He trained in a number of different schools and when he went to the
person who

was eventually to become his true teacher, Fa-yen (Jap: Goso Hoen), they
had

this dialogue. Fa-yen said, "Well, it's as I thought, you don't
understand."-

And Yuan-wu thought this was a bad teacher and said, "Well, I do
understand.

Sorry." And the teacher said, "Oh, that's okay, remember me when you are
sick

with fever." And Yuan-wu went away. And years later when he was ill in
bed, he

remembered Fa-yen's words. And he went back to him when he was better,
and in

turn became as well known. And his name is still remembered in rural New
South

Wales.

This is an example of what the koan tradition can provide when it is
doing well.

Later perhaps I'll talk about what it provides when it's not doing well,
which

is also a reality. But we respect somebody who tells us the truth and the
great

tradition does tell us the truth about ourselves. And we respect somebody
who

tells us the truth even more than somebody who gives us tea and cookies.
There

is a part of us that is hungry to know the truth, hungry to open up. And
there's

another part of us that wants to cruise and will even do weird things
like zazen

in order NOT to open up. But it is true that no matter why we come to
Zen, in

all of us there is this marvellous seed that wishes to bloom and wishes to connect with others in the universe who are on the same path.

When we become clear - I don't know about you - my experience is that everybody's path is to some extent unique. Yet the view is the same. So that some people have big ecstatic, sometimes obnoxiously ecstatic experiences and other people don't seem to have experiences with a big E, but get clearer and clearer gradually, all the time. From my point of view, there's no approved method of coming to understanding, it is just important that we come to understanding. There's no particular value in flash. I think there is a great value in sincerity and being honest with ourselves.

And when we come to realisation, I think what has happened is we've stopped getting in our own way and at each level of realisation, this is true. Whatever intimations or glimpses we have come when we stop having opinions about our experience. We stop having our customary opinions and before new opinions pour in, there is a gap and we can actually experience our own lives and our own home. And this is what the koan tradition is all about. Sometimes it uses language that is alien to us for reasons of culture and this is too bad and the only excuse I can offer is that our ancient teachers in China were greater than we are and we are struggling to do our best, but there it is. And sometimes the expressions are strange because they come from beyond our small self and demand a wider view than we have available. And so there can be both this tantalising, exquisite and painful quality to following the way of reality.

However when things do become clear because for the moment there is nothing in the way of the view, the taste is very strong, and this is what keeps us coming back to retreats. We all know how repulsive a retreat is. (Laughter) And yet, I don't think I'm ever happier than in sesshin, really. And I never like to get up in the morning. And that hasn't changed. (Laughter) What a joy we have. Your realisation opens the gate of life and we know when that gate is open, we can taste it, we can smell it, we can feel it with every pore of our skin and we know the difference. We know when we are walking in the Tao and when we are merely somnambulating, when we are just wandering along, asleep on our feet and when we can say we are in the Tao, when the gates of life are open.

And then I think some of the things we have previously valued can seem rather small. You know, when you're a Zen teacher people give you odd things.
And somebody for some reason gave me a gold coin a few years ago, some kind of English sovereign with St. George fighting the Dragon on it. And I looked at it and thought, how wonderful, I've never had a gold coin in my whole life and then I thought, what on earth will I do with it? (Laughs) And you know someone will break into the house and steal it. Suddenly I had something else that I didn't want to lose. And when I was planning this talk I just noticed that I don't even know where it is and I don't care if I've lost it. It's hard to really care about a gold coin. It doesn't hold us. It doesn't hold the great Way. Or whatever your particular thing is, you know what it is that you're greedy for or you hold onto.

And I think that's why we come together in groups with other people who are just as strange as we are and don't agree with us at all. And we make great sacrifices and do things like building this temple at Gorricks Run. What a marvellous thing. It is because when we have tasted the Great Way, the sacrifices are not so bad, you're not so interested in the small way. When we have tasted the Great Way, it has an effect on us and it is almost as if we must be faithful to it or we become more unhappy. I think what's true is that we have just become aware of our suffering in a way that we were not previously aware. I don't know about you, but I have found out much more about my weaknesses and the things I do badly and am ashamed of the deeper I got into Zen. And that's the kind of gift that the Way gives us. That we notice more and more the petty greeds and dishonesties of our lives and that they sharply hurt in a way I never noticed before. Or I thought, well that's not too important. I'm good in other ways. Something like that, you know. But there is a way in which the Tao demands a kind of selflessness of us and when we are going against that, that universal process, then we suffer and suffer acutely.

So it is a very hard, tangible truth that we meet. And it is somehow greater than what we call our small self, that kind of eager level that makes plans and knows what is right and wrong and categorises right and wrong a great deal,

which is not such a bad thing you know. But it nests within this vastly greater reality and we keep hearing the song of that greater reality. And then when we hear that song, whatever happens has joy. It is like water sparkling in sunlight, endlessly alive. We can say there is a mysterious essence of perfume, a light, not ordinarily visible in things. And it gives us the bright colours of the world. Everything we have lost is returned. And it gives us compassion, so that I think when we begin to see that light, our lives begin to transform into service.

There is absolutely no doubt about it, when you can see the light, you are free really to do as you wish. The storehouse of treasures opens of itself, you may take them and use them any way you wish, said Dogen when he came home from China, very excited. And yet what we wish is in conformity with that greater light, that song at the edge of the mind. It is not what we would have thought when somebody said, well you can do what you want. It is not in the realm of getting away with things. It is more a kind of impassioned letting go, an impassioned release.

And when the light is not apparent to us and in some way it has gone dark, then it is very very dark, things are very very dark and we really know the meaning of the saying to be caught in the six worlds of birth and death, and endlessly we cycle through, the gain and loss. We grab something and it is snatched away from us. We hold onto something, again it is snatched away from us. And the return home is always to become aware of this process. It is not to long for it to stop. It is to honestly notice it. And then we notice, as we grab, as we fix on something, as we attach, we notice that the loss is being created right there.

One of the traditional words for the light at the edge of being is *vajra*. And vajra is a word that refers to the adamantine, the harder-than-diamond quality of realisation but also of reality, that it is just there. The sun just comes up. And I think when we turn towards the Tao, when we settle into the Tao and begin to hear that great voice of the universe, the voice of Kuan Yin, we are forced to become more tolerant of those times when we are not, when are lost to

it. That even when we create wisdom, that too is something we attach to, and create ignorance by holding onto. Most people come to Zen to know, and sometimes it is very hard to realise that the great truth can be, I don't know.

And what a relief this can be but also in its own way a discipline, to accept in us the darkness and the mystery.

In meditation we develop states of great clarity but we also develop states of cow-like ignorance, bovine ponderousness. Specially after lunch. Or states when we are consumed with waiting for the bell to ring so that we can stretch our knees or wondering if we will ever wake up. States when we are consumed by our own sense of unworthiness. Another way in which we move away from the Great Matter, from the Great Way. Clinging to our idea that we know who we are and we are bad, when in truth we do not know who we are and it is only megalomania that makes us think we are worthless.

So we have to be willing to accept those strange passions that come over us in zazen as also part of the path. And I think to be a bodhisattva is not to be clear all the time, the great difficulty and why the bodhisattva is the interesting and difficult path to walk is because it entails waking up the mind of light and the mind of compassion in the midst of our difficulty. Anybody can be compassionate when he or she is happy. What about when things are difficult? To wake up the mind of the Way, to turn home at that time, is the bodhisattva path.

And to accept the Way even when it's patchy. Sometimes we have great clarity and insight in sesshin and then as soon as we starting thinking, Wow, I really got it, you know, then it is not so clear anymore suddenly. And I think all we can do is to be honest with ourselves and to be honest with ourselves at such a time is a great gift.

I spoke of Yuan-wu before, who compiled the Blue Cliff Record. The teacher who originally collected it and wrote verses to each case was Hsueh Tou and he wrote an interesting verse, one line of which said, "The grasses grow thick and nests overhang" I think this misty quality is very characteristic of our Way. To

accept the "don't knowing" quality in our mind and embrace that and find the great clarity right there. This is the distinctive feature of the Mahayana, the willingness to work with the difficult stuff, the intransigent material of the world, willing to get entangled with the suffering of ourselves and of others in order to further the Way.

So, whatever technique we use, we will find that it is wonderful and then it fails to work for a while. In Zen we take up the method and then we deal with what happens. And fidelity and truthfulness is to take up the method honestly. So when we take up the koan we take it up honestly and we pour ourselves into it. And then things happen. We get bored, we hate it, we wish we had another koan. We get very excited and assured that we have finally found the Way. Many things happen. We suddenly remember things from our childhood and can't remember the koan. We are suddenly thrust into the truth of the suffering that is very present in our lives, in our family, at work. So we honestly try the method and then we work with what comes up. Simple, huh. And then of course we find many things. You can use the koan or the breath as a sword to clear away the grass and for a while it seems like we will finally make it to the horizon, slashing away like that. But the horizon keeps receding. And when that method doesn't work, you may find that incorporating, being generous with what comes up works better. I am very angry and I cannot cut it away with my koan any longer, so I will acknowledge my anger and sink into it, invite it. And that is wonderful and then after a while THAT doesn't work any more.

The Tao is always moving and always flowing. Whatever we hold onto will be snatched away from us. But it is also in the Tao that endlessly we take up the koan, endlessly we take up the Great Way, serving the Great Light beyond our small selves, that Great Light in which we are all linked and all completely at home, completely of one family, doing zazen together at Gorricks Run.

(This Teisho was given at the 1990 Winter Sesshin at Gorricks Run Zendo)

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