

This document was originally distributed on Internet as a part of the Electronic Buddhist Archives, available via anonymous FTP and/or COOMBSQUEST gopher on the node COOMBS.ANU.EDU.AU

The document's ftp filename and the full directory path are given in the coombspapers top level INDEX file.

This version of the document has been reformatted by Barry Kapke and is being distributed, with permission, via the DharmaNet Buddhist File Distribution Network.

[Last updated: 27 November 1993]

DISTRIBUTION AGREEMENT

TITLE OF WORK: Yang-shan's Mind and Environment
FILENAME: YANGSHAN.ZIP (Internet: tarrant-teisho-92-spring.txt)
AUTHOR: John Tarrant, Roshi
AUTHOR'S ADDRESS: Diamond Sangha, Santa Rosa, CA
PUBLISHER'S ADDRESS: Sydney Zen Center, 251 Young St.
Annandale, Sydney, NSW 2038, Australia
DATE OF PUBLICATION: 1992
ORIGIN SITE: coombs.anu.edu.au

The author retains all rights to this work and hereby grants electronic distribution rights to DharmaNet International. This work may be freely copied and redistributed, provided that it is accompanied by this Agreement and is distributed at no cost to the recipient. If this work is used by a teacher in a class, or is quoted in a review, the author shall be notified of such use.

It is the spirit of dana, freely offered generosity, which has kept the entire Buddhist tradition alive for more than 2,500 years. If you find this work of value, please consider sending a donation to the author or publisher, so that these works may continue to be made available. May your generosity contribute to the happiness of all beings everywhere.

DharmaNet International, P.O. Box 4951, Berkeley, CA 94704-4951

"YANG-SHAN'S MIND AND ENVIRONMENT".

This text addresses some of the most fundamental and delicate religious issues. Therefore, it should be read, quoted and analysed in a mindful way.

All copyrights to this document belong to John Tarrant, California Diamond Sangha, Santa Rosa, Cal., USA
Enquiries: The Editor, "Mind Moon Circle", Sydney Zen Centre, 251 Young St., Annandale, Sydney, NSW 2038, Australia. Tel: + 61 2 660 2993

YANG-SHAN'S MIND AND ENVIRONMENT

JOHN TARRANT, ROSHI

This is a koan from the Book of Equanimity. Yang-shan asks a student, "What is your native place?" And the student says, "I come from Yu Province." Yang-shan says, "Do you consider the inside of it?" And the student answers, "I always do." Yang-shan: "That which thinks is consciousness, that which is thought about is the environment. Within it there are mountains, rivers and the great earth, towers, palaces, people, animals and other things. But reflect upon the mind that thinks. Are there are lots of things there?" The student: "I don't see anything at all there." Yang-shan: "That's correct, as far as the degree of belief is concerned but as for the degree of being human, it is not enough." The student: "Your Reverence, do you have some special advice?" Yang-shan: "It's not good enough as long as you say there is nothing in particular. From now on meditate on sitting down and wearing clothes." There's a poem that goes with this case.

All embracing with no outside,
penetrating without being obstructed,
gates and walls like cliffs, doors and locks.
When the wine is always sweet, it lays out the guests.
Though the meal is filling, it ruins the farmers.
Bursting out of the clear sky,
the garuda takes wing on the wind,
treading over the blue sea.
Thunder follows the roaming dragon.

My experience during my own training was that around the middle of sesshin, I would begin to have some understanding of the old koans, which would always leave me after sesshin. And on those grounds, I'd like to look at this koan in some detail to give you some sense of where we come from in the Dharma, and also of the high seriousness with which the old teachers regarded the quest into reality.

Yang-shan was with his teacher Keui-shan, the co-founder of the Kuei-yang School of Zen, (Jap: Igyo), the School of Equals. He lived in the ninth century during the flowering of the Tang Dynasty. He was something of a character and there were many legends about him.

One day a magician came and visited him from India. The Magician said, "Hi." And Yang-shan said, "Where have you come from?" The Magician said: "India." Yang-shan: "Well, when did you leave?" The Magician: "Oh, this morning." Yang-shan: "What took you so long?" The Magician: "Oh, I went sightseeing on the way, dropped by Tibet, things like that." Yang-shan: "You are a great magician but you have no sense of the Dharma at all. You do not know who you are." And the magician flew back to India and told his followers. "I went to China to look up Manjusri but met Little Shakyamuni instead". That was his nickname, because he had no one way of teaching people, unlike some of the other old teachers. One old teacher, for example, whenever he was asked a question, would turn and sit facing the wall. No matter what you asked, "What is the subtle essence of Buddhism?" he would turn and sit facing the wall. "What's for lunch?" He would turn and face the wall - a very simple and powerful technique. But Yang-shan always adapted himself.

There are a number of stories of him involved with occult powers although he valued them very little. One man came and had a long Dharma dialogue with him. Yang-shan was the holder of a lineage that has died out, in which there were ninety-seven symbols that were used for different domains of Zen, different domains of realisation. For example, a circle was used, and this was a dance form of dialogue, a

dramatic powerful dance form, and we only have a few of these symbols remaining in some old koans. So this pilgrim of the Way came and had a whole dance with Yang-shan. He walked into the meditation hall and asked him, "Do you know how to read and write?" And Yang-shan said, "As my profession requires." The student then drew a circle in the air and said, "What character is that?" Yang-shan drew a cross on the ground, and the dialogue went on. The student circled, ran around him and said, "Well, what character is that?" Yang-shan turned, added a little cornice on the cross and turned it into the Buddhist symbol of good fortune. The student held up the moon with his hands, like a guardian deity, and said, "What character is that?" Then Yang-shan drew a circle around his symbol and the student posed like deity with his fist and a fierce scowl and Yang-shan just said, "Good, look after it." And then, so the story goes, the student walked outside the gates of the temple, and stepped up into the air and disappeared. And one of Yang-shan's students came to him and said, "You know, this person actually stepped up into the air. I am familiar with states of meditation but I do not know this one." Yang-shan said, "I'll explain it to you in terms of meaning. This is eightfold concentration. The ocean of awareness turns into the ocean of meanings. The essence is the same but in the meanings there is cause, effect, simultaneity and difference in time, totality and distinction. This is none other than the body concealment concentration." What he means is, it's good to contemplate on sitting down and wearing clothes.

So Yang-shan was a remarkable person. In this particular case, the student arrives and he asks him, "Well, where do you come from?" which is a standard opening. And the student replies, "From Yu Province", and Yang-shan immediately and swiftly moves in on the student and says, "Do you think about the inside of it?" Suddenly the dialogue gets wierd. It's as if you walked in and talked to a cat and then suddenly realised it was a very very large cat with stripes. But the student is quite quick and comes back saying, "I always do." The comment here by one of the old teachers is, "A familiar place is hard to forget." But then Yang-shan launches into a wonderful offering, a pure gift for the student. He sees really that the student can't quite meet him, but he handles it with grace and power and eloquence. "Within it there are mountains, rivers and the great earth, towers, palaces, people, animals and other things."

In other words, the great display that is always going on, the great event of our lives, going on and on, inside and out. So Yang-shan says, "That is the environment, yes. But reflect upon the mind that thinks, the consciousness that is aware. Are there a lot of things there?"

This is like when the second Great Ancestor, Hui-Ke, comes to Bodhidharma and says, "My mind is not at rest, I beg you, please put it to rest." And Bodhidharma says, "Bring me your mind and I will put it to rest." And so Hui-Ke goes away for a few years and he comes back and says, "I've searched for my mind and I cannot find it." And Bodhidharma says, "There! I have put it to rest." And Hui-Ke becomes enlightened. So Yang-shan's student says, "No, there are not a lot of things there. I can't see. I don't see anything at all there - nothing, nothing, nothing." This is a very common perspective in meditation. When you really look very deeply it is hard to find something.

People say many things in this state. Hakuin described it as a sheet of ice stretching for a thousand miles, or as the iron cliffs and silver mountains, something very pure and strong and featureless. After his enlightenment experience Hakuin, carefully wrote it out in his good

calligraphy and brought it along and handed it to the teacher, who was a difficult person who didn't really like to see students much, but was persuaded by a fellow-student to give Hakuin an interview. So Hakuin handed over his writing, saying, "Well, here is my enlightenment experience." And the teacher crumpled up the piece of paper and dropped it and said, "Why don't you speak?" Hakuin said, "There is nothing to take hold of." So Hakuin had the same kind of point of view as Yang-shan's student. "When I look, there is nothing there."

In Hakuin's case, his teacher handled it a little differently from Yang-shan, because he took hold of Hakuin's nose and said, "I find it easy to take hold of it," and twisted it, and threw him down the steps. Hakuin was most insulted and went away in high dudgeon, but later on he came to revere that teacher, after he finally understood what the teacher meant, and he returned and told him. Hakuin reports, "He did not really say anything much, he smiled a little. But he stopped calling me the demon who dwells in a hole." A hard teacher to please.

So. "I don't see anything at all there," said the student to Yang-shan, who replied, "That is correct so far as the degree of belief is concerned." That will get you to where the scriptures will take you but that is not the experience of being human, the true deep experience of humanity. Yang-shan is saying that the degree of belief is all in the sutras and you can read about it, you can understand it and you can even have some quite nice deep experiences about it but it is not enough to bring you back out into the world. This is what Hakuin's teacher meant by "a demon dwelling in a hole". It is sometimes called a corpse living in a coffin. The vampire Zen. We must go beyond this sense of the emptiness of things.

It's not the same thing as tasting the tea for yourself. How do you explain a kiss to someone who has never kissed or been kissed? This experience of "I don't see anything at all" is the entry into the great world, but if we stop there, it's like setting up camp in the vestibule or on the porch outside the great mansion and all the time thinking we are living in the palace. It is not quite good enough to just value the emptiness and the transitoriness and the shadowy insubstantial eternal quality of things. That is not enough. Yang-shan obviously sees the degree of being human as a higher thing, which is very interesting. He says, in effect, anybody can be a saint but who can be human? Anybody call dwell in eternity but you must come here and live with the rest of us to become truly someone who upholds the Way.

There are many koans like this. One old hermit thumped his staff before the assembly and said, "When the ancient ones reached this place, why didn't they stay there?" It was one of those staffs with rings on it, so it jingled. No one could answer. So he answered himself. "It has no power for the Way." When you are in the great peace of meditation, the great peace is not quite enough. Even the awareness of the eternity of meditation from the beginning of time is a kind of great thought. If you are there, it has been likened to sitting on top of a very tall pole and you must take the step off the pole. In this dialogue, the student then says something which I think is good. He was blocked and stopped. He met the shock of the Dharma, where the ideas we have been familiar with are no longer quite real but nothing has filled their place and so there is that sense of being turned inside out. I've known people to throw up at this time; one friend of mine actually spent five days flopping in and out of the meditation hall throwing up, and everybody had to take care of her. She was living in a room with about five other women, in a dormitory, and from about Day One she totally lost time and

people had to get her up and lead her by the hand into the meditation hall, show her the cushion, and she would just sit through and then she would flop around and fall off and people would have to carry her out and put her to bed and feed her and everything. And after about five days she came out of this and I asked her, "Well, what happened?" And she said, "I was sitting in the dokusan line and I noticed that the wall exactly met the floor. And it made me so happy." Then she could answer all the koan questions and was laughing for the rest of the sesshin. Everything was turned upside down.

Yang-shan's student, in this state of shock, asked, "Do you have any special advice for me?" And Yang-shan replied, "To say that there is nothing special is not it. It's not enough to say there is nothing special. It does not hit the mark. From now on, meditate on sitting down and wearing clothes." So Yang-shan asks us to look into our own lives and find the truth here, in the sitting down and wearing clothes. This is not the magic of people stepping into the air and disappearing. This is a greater magic still.

Yang-shan and his teacher had an unusual relationship, they were very close and there's a special sort of warmth of feeling about their connection. Many teachers would push their students very hard but both Keui-shan and Yang-shan would make a hole for the students to fall into, I think. And there are many interactions that end with them agreeing with each other, whereas even on his death bed, Lin-chi called his great successor a blind donkey. "Who would believe my true Dharma would be inherited by this blind donkey?" he said, and staggered up and hit him for the last time. And that was how his student got succession, that was his praise, encouraging him to keep alive, keep moving.

One day, Keui-shan and Yang-shan were sitting around having tea and Keui-shan said, "Suppose somebody asks you, "How about one who says that all sentient beings are in a disorderly karmic consciousness and have no base to rely on?" - what would you say?" Yang-shan replied, "Well, if somebody appears, I call to him, and when he turns his head, instantly I say, "what is that?" I wait while he hesitates, and then I say to him, "There is not only disorderly karmic consciousness but there is no base to rely on." And Keui-shan said, "Oh, good." Both are very learned and sharp and quick in the mind, but there is also this friendly attentive quality of the relationship between these two, where the teacher just approves and says, "Oh, good." There is a sense of play. I think it's good to remember that even the greatest ones worry about the small particulars of transmitting the Way from long ago.

I think the companionship of the Way is part of the deep matrix of Zen. It's a precious thing to sit with each other and a great help in the Tao. Over and over again we are taught by our peers and we are held in our zazen by each other. When you are sitting with devoted attention, you do not just do your own zazen, but in a sense you hold the whole meditation hall and everyone around you is a little changed. There are great field effects, I think, in human life and when we do zazen we become a little more aware of them. Whenever you sit, you sit with everyone else who has ever sat. and just because you are sitting facing a wall does not mean you are not being companionable. The deeper your zazen, the more intimate and companionable the connection becomes. This kind of connection we have in ordinary life at extreme times when it is common to be able to feel and touch the mind. Through zazen we can realise how natural this deep connection to each other is, not only a matter of getting our attention in extreme conditions, but something every day, just sitting down and wearing clothes, that we are always in

communion. So I think one of the deep bases of Zen is this kind of love, both of the Way and of each other doing the Way, all struggling and doing our best, sometimes even doing our worst and still it is a matter of the love of the Way.

An image comes to mind, perhaps it is a Hokusai woodblock, of all these blind people staggering across a bridge together, holding hands, and the one in front is reaching out with a stick - the teacher obviously - and everyone else is holding on. And it's very beautiful, very pure. There is the great life, right there, and as long as we keep holding hands, we will get there.

After sitting alone for a long time, when I first went to a training centre and became part of a group, I had reservations about it. It had never occurred to me that it was a good thing to do, or that it would help me. But when I discovered that it would help me to become part of a group and sit with others, then I was taken in by an older student who didn't pretend he knew a lot more than me, although he actually did know more, but he encouraged me, gave me a sense of the reality of the Way and that what I was doing was worthwhile. And that somehow deepened my zazen, the fact that he took his own zazen so seriously and encouraged me to do it, "Even", as he said, "if you don't do it in this lifetime, next lifetime will be okay". We used to sit up together nights in sesshin. I remember the first time he was Jikijitsu, he came and apologised for not sitting up with me because the strain of being Jiki made his knees hurt so much he had to go to bed. But he hoped I would sit up anyway. We are still close friends.

This kind of relationship is very important, the true teaching in which we hold each other in zazen. We are not doing it for ourselves alone, we are doing it for all beings, and I think this is consoling, that this sincere effort is never wasted. This is not truly a solitary path, although each of us takes his or her own individual responsibility. The effects of your coming back to zazen, of finding the zazen rising automatically, are felt by everyone. And the paradox is that the deeper you do your own zazen, and the less you worry about other peoples' zazen, the deeper you care for other people and the better care you take of other people and the more natural it is. The compassion is this natural movement that is not different from zazen and does not take you out of your zazen.

Hsueh-feng, (Seppo) another character in Zen, was enlightened by a fellow student younger than he, called Yen-tou (Ganto). In a famous story, they were snowed in together in a village called Tortoise Mountain. Hsueh-feng was sitting very hard, meditating, trying to get enlightened. And his friend Yen-tou saw this and had compassion for him but nevertheless slept for a few days, until the time was right. Then he opened his eyes and challenged his friend. I think this is very important. He didn't do anything immediately. He just sat there and waited. And sometimes it is good to wait, you know. Sometimes it is not possible to teach somebody and the time must be right, and it is really important to have the sense that waiting can be a very good thing, a very fertile thing.

We are waiting for the seasons to change. We are waiting for our time to come around, or that opening to appear in the Tao where we can walk through and touch somebody. Whereas if we had moved before, everything would have been wrong - no point, no effect. Sometimes the right thing to do is to wait. In the hexagram in the I-Ching about waiting, it says you should enjoy yourself with this kind of waiting, you should eat and

drink and be of good cheer. We do not need to be dour about waiting because we are in tune with the seasons. It is the right time to wait.

So Yen-tou spent a few days sleeping and waiting and then he woke up and said, "What are you doing, sitting there like a wooden Buddha by the roadside?" and his friend said, "My heart is not at rest, that is why I sit so hard." And Yen-tou then sensed he was ready, and leaned on him a little, questioning him about his experiences. Hsueh-feng, who was already fairly old in the Dharma and had been sitting for thirty odd years said, "Well, you know I've had various experiences, it was like the bottom dropped out of the bucket one time when I met Tung-shan, and then later when I met Te-shan...." and Yen-tou interrupted by yelling at the top of his voice, "Don't you know that the family treasure does not come in through the gate, it comes out of your own breast and covers heaven and earth!" And Hsueh-feng became enlightened. And as he jumped up and down he said, "At this moment, the village of Tortoise Mountain has become enlightened." This moment, the whole of Gorricks Run and all the valley down to Wisemans Ferry became enlightened. So he knew his whole connection, the whole connection, the whole of NSW, the whole of Australia, and it became enlightened way back in time, back to Gwandanaland, and ahead, far ahead, till the earth falls into the sun. The enlightenment extends in all directions of space and time.

There was a samurai monk, who had a predilection for sitting in the mountains. He loved the solitude and introversion and really wanted to go into the silence, but he had to come and down and be a samurai in the bustle of the city. He said, "I really longed to be a hermit up in the mountains, a solitary person of the Way, and if I had done that, I would have been what is called a good man of the Way. And I would never have realised how many faults I have. Now I am an ordinary person of the world and I am very aware of my faults." This is the degree of being human. It is wonderful to discover our faults - yes! that is something we can work with. It is the faults we do not know about that are the problem for our friends. I think that when we have discovered the flaws and have somehow accepted that we have them and are no longer trying to hide them so hard, but are willing to work on them and let them out from under the bed, other people find it easier to be with them too. It is when we are ashamed of them, and they come out in meaner forms and are hard to deal with.

So, here we are sitting together with the birds and the trees and each other.

We must find out the way in which we are one with the birds and the trees and then we will laugh with Yang-shan about sitting down and wearing clothes. When everything is peaceful and deep, it is easy to become serene and find the serenity a kind of mild and amiable prison. But when we wake up the love of the Way, wake up that fellowship of the Way, we walk together and do not just rely on the samadhi, because when samadhi falls away, so does the peace and equanimity. So within the peace find that unity with the koan, with all the old teachers, find the equanimity even when the zazen falls apart, find the equanimity with that. And then, in some deep way, the equanimity will always be there, rain or shine.

end of file