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"THAT GREAT SLEEPING DRAGON OF JOY"
a teisho by John Tarrant, Roshi

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

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

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THAT GREAT SLEEPING DRAGON OF JOY
John Tarrant, Roshi

Someone asked Lin-chi, What is the Buddha-devil? This question arose from a previous talk he gave about thrusting Buddhas and devils aside. As people will, someone must have fixed on one part of this talk and asked, Whats the Buddha-devil? So he said,

If you have doubts in your mind for an instant, thats the Buddha-devil. If you can understand that the ten thousand phenomena were never born, that the mind is like a conjurors trick, then not one speck of dust, not one phenomenon, will exist. Everything will be clean and pure and this will be Buddha. Buddha and devil just refer to two states, one stained, one pure. As I see it, there is no Buddha, no living beings, no long ago, no now. If you want to get it, youve already got it. Its not something that requires time. Theres no religious practice, no enlightenment, no getting anything, no missing out on anything; at no time is there any other dharma than this. If anyone claims there is a dharma superior to this, I say it must be a dream.

All I have to say to you is simply this: followers of the Way, this lone brightness before my eyes now, this person plainly listening to me, this person is unimpeded at any point, but penetrates the ten directions, free to do as he or she pleases in the threefold world. No matter what environment you may encounter, with its peculiarities and differences, you cannot be swayed or pulled awry. In the space of an instant you make your way into the dharma realm. If you meet a Buddha, you preach to the Buddha; if you meet an ancestor, you preach to the ancestor; if you meet an arhat, you preach to the arhat; if you meet a hungry ghost, you preach to the hungry ghost. You go everywhere, wandering through many lands, teaching and converting living beings and never becoming separated from this single thought.

Each place for such a one is clean and pure; the light pierces the ten directions, the ten thousand phenomena; a single thusness.

Followers of the Way, the really first-rate person knows right now that from the first theres never been anything that needed doing. Its because you dont have enough faith that you rush around moment by moment looking for something. You throw away your head and hunt for your head, and you cant seem to stop yourselves. You are like the bodhisattva of perfect and immediate enlightenment, who manifests his body in the dharma realm but who, in the midst of the pure land, still hates the state of common mortal and prays to become a sage. People like that have yet to forget about choices; their minds are still occupied with thoughts about purity and impurity. But the Chan school doesnt see things that way. What counts is this present moment; theres nothing that requires a lot of time. Everything I say to you is for the moment only, medicine to cure the disease. Ultimately it has no true reality. If you can see things in this way you will be true people who have left the household, free to spend ten thousand pieces of gold every day.

Followers of the Way, dont let just anyone put their stamp of approval on your face; dont say, I understand Zen; I understand the Way, spouting off like a waterfall. All that sort of thing is karma, leading to hell. If you are a person who honestly wants to learn the Way, dont go looking for the worlds mistakes, but set about as fast as you can looking for true and proper understanding. If you can acquire true and proper understanding thats clear and complete, then you can think about calling it quits.

Lin-chi speaks about as plainly as anybody does, I think. He says that when doubt is raised for an instant in your mind, thats the consciousness of hell, thats the demons world. Buddha and devil just refer to two states, one stained, one pure. Well, we know when were in hell; we know what that feels like and tastes like and smells like. We know how thick it is and how close to us it is. And we know what the other kinds of states are like too. And its best not to chase different states, just to be one right where you are, in whatever condition you are in.

One of the interesting things that we notice in a retreat is how quickly states succeed each other. We normally have the idea that if we are in hell this is a bad thing, and well have to spend a long time with a shovel, digging our way out. But this is not so. Somebody asked Nanao Sakaki, the fine poet who saw Hiroshima, How do we survive nuclear catastrophe? He said, No need to survive. No need to survive hell either. Wherever you are, that can be the pure land. I have always loved Buddhist paintings in the esoteric tradition that show the sufferings of the hell realmsthey are rather like medieval Christian paintings, with flames and pitchforks and horns and so on. But there is always a little Buddha sitting in the hell realm, looking exactly like all the other demons, with horns and a big smile . . . So if you are in hell, perhaps you can be one of those demons, a Buddha demon.

One of the problems with human beings is the forgetting. I think if you've passed the first gate in the Way, you have set to rest doubt in your heart. But you have not necessarily set to rest forgetting. And we forget so quickly. And when we forget we do not realize that this hell realm too is pure and beautiful. So we start calling it hell, and we start calling it an obstacle and a problem. And then anything can become an attack. A sound can be a distraction instead of an opening; pain somehow seems very thick and unassailable. We need in some way to do zazen deeply enough so that we are pulled back almost involuntarily to the Way when we fall out of it. Walking the Way is sometimes called falling out of the Way.

Aitken Roshi came to visit recently in California and I asked him, "What are you teaching these days?"

"Well, at the beginning I teach people breath counting," he said. "You do?" I said. And he said, "I teach them to try not to get to ten." I thought, "I will take up that path myself."

Always, this is it. If you think you have turned away from it, that's not true: it is still here; it is always here. Lin-chi calls it this solitary light, this lone light, before my eyes. It can't go anywhere; it can't dim; you can't dispose of it down the sink; a disease can't take it away from you; even losing your mind, even dementia, can't deprive you of it. It is always here. In sesshin we can see that, and it looks bright. If it does not look bright, then we just notice what it does look like. And if we go into that, we'll sooner or later find it is the brightness. If it is foggy and unclear, go into foggy and unclear, and you'll find it is there. If you have a pain in the body or a tightness in the body, and you go into the pain or the tightness, you'll find something begins to shift and happen. Probably you will panic. Then you'll have panic. One thing is always arising after another and we get stuck on trying to do the last thing. If we go into the body, fear comes up which is just the ego having a thrill so then we notice fear, but we keep trying to say, No, no, I want to get back to the body. But how can we do that? It's fear. Then we have distraction, but we want to have the fear there for a while.

A lot of teachers speak about fear. It is one of the common states, one way or another, in Buddhism. Fear arises because when things start to open up for us we really can't believe it. So we have to keep coming up to the gate again and again, till we believe it. It's that simple. Again and again we walk to the gate, and if we really observe that path itself, that walking, the sheer joy, there's nothing wrong with walking that for the rest of our lives. Still walking to the gate fortunately. Thank you very much, I have no complaints.

So wherever we are, we just walk; we walk the road; and it unfolds in great beauty. We get many different glimpses, and some glimpses have a quality of irreversibility about them, and we give them fancy names,

like kensho or whatever. But really they are just another foot on the road. When Yamada Roshi received his final transmission from Yasutani Roshi, Yasutani Roshi said, Now your practice can begin. Yamada Roshi then said this to Aitken Roshi. Aitken Roshi said this to me. And he meant it! Just in case I thought I had started Zen, he was going to clear up any illusions I had. The point is quite serious. Now it begins. Each moment: Now it begins. And that's the great joy: that we have entered something that can go on deepening and opening for as long as we are still kicking and breathing. It is good to have something that will be with you for as long as you are here. What a gift. Many things will pass away and be taken from you, many things you will become disgusted with, but this cannot be taken from you: you never tire of the love of the Way.

If you want to get it, you've already got it, says Lin-chi. It's not something that requires time. It's hard to conceive that: It's not something that requires time. We are so used to patient cultivation and careful development. Or even running full speed that still requires time. But it is already here, and everything we do really just keeps us coming towards, circling towards, that truth. There is nothing we need to do to fill the space in our lives, because there is no space in our lives. It is here; eternity is already here. There is nothing we need to do to extinguish the karma that we have brought with us: everything is already here; we don't need to extinguish the karma. There is no particular way we need to hold our mouths in order to get enlightened, there is no particular state of mind we need, no particular kind of automobile; it's already here. This person, says Lin-chi, is unimpeded at any point, but penetrates the ten directions, free to do as she or he pleases in the world. No matter what environment you may encounter with its peculiarities and differences you cannot be swayed or pulled away.

Sometimes we do well when things are going badly because it gets our attention, but this is a dangerous way to live, because the Tao will arrange our lives to go badly for us so that we can pay attention. We can relax: we don't need to break our legs in order to walk the Tao. We need to attend. Sometimes things are going well, so at that moment we go to sleep. It's sometimes quite hard when deep in sesshin to continue to wake up the Way, because everything is so peaceful. And that is fine, but peacefulness is again just another state, so it is always good when you are deep, deep, deep, to find a way to stay deep and to keep walking. You don't have to wrench yourself out in order to keep walking, but find a way to have both the depth and the continuity of the journey. So that you don't just become a wooden Buddha sitting there, rather blissful but rather stupid which we can do. The depth is good and has a very healing force in the body, and in your heart as well, but it is very important to keep going at this time. It is easy just to forget.

It is very important to realise that walking is Zen, just as sitting is Zen. Everything is Zen. Falling over and breaking your leg is Zen. It's right here always. When you have a wonderful moment of rapture in zazen, that is the Buddha land and that is Zen. When your zazen goes all to hell and you are absorbed with petty thoughts, that is the Buddha land and that is zazen. So we don't refuse one and choose the other. When we do that we start living in heaven and hell, and it takes a lot of effort to stay in hell which is what we choose when we have that choice, always. So we keep always aware that it is this, right now. The really first-rate person knows right now that from the first there's never been anything that needed doing. It's

because you dont have sufficient faith that you rush around moment by moment looking for something. You throw away your head and hunt for your head, and you cant seem to stop yourself. There is a compulsive quality to the way we look for our heads, isnt there? We could start a twelve-step group: People with No Heads. Because it is a sort of addiction that fills the void we have created with our small minds. We have created this game that we are deluded and then we look for enlightenment. But if we omit the first step, we can cut out the middleman entirely and we can go directly to the source.

Compassion is a natural part of the Way and is very mysterious and deeply important. I think we know very little about love really which is why we talk about it all the time. Its healing powers are very great. It is a natural thing that comes with awakening; it comes out of the heart. A moment of awakening in sesshin, even if it doesnt stick, will still open the heart a little and some of that will stay. And yet it is easy to fight with each other in a zendo. It is easy to be right and have other people wrong. It is a tiresome game, and at the bottom we know it is not true. When I consider the virtue of abusive words, as Torei Zenji says. Torei did not say that because he had no experience of the difficulty of life: he just used everything as a door. He was a very tough customer. He was the founder of Ryutakuji temple, which has an association with our lineage: it was Soen Roshis temple and Gempo Roshis temple.

Compassion can not only open things in the body, it can open the Way for you. If you remember the basic rule that ninety percent of everything everybody says is projection, then ninety percent of what you say is projection, so if you do not have compassion with somebody theres a problem in you, theres a shrivelling in your own heart; in some way youve closed yourself off to your own virtue and your own light. Its important to remember this. If compassion is not there, then that is good too, that too is the Buddha land; but then if we go inside and notice it, if we reflect, suddenly it arrives again. Its like when were going deep in zazen and fear arises: if we say, Get out of the way, the fear gets bigger. We notice, Ah, fear; then that too is golden. The same with any pain we can have. This is really all about respect for Buddha-nature, for your own Buddha-nature: if you can respect your own Buddha-nature you can respect others, because it is the same damn thing! So its not a great effort to stretch across. Its one golden chain.

So in your zazen, if you get out of the way, Buddha-nature will awaken, because the inside aspect of it so so bright, its so vivid that we cant not see it. If we try to flee from it, it will chase us. Everywhere we look, there it is. If you run into a dark room, there it is. And everywhere we flee, there it is too; its always there, its always in front of us. And this is the most ordinary thing in the world. This is the other truth that is very obvious now. Its wearing clothes, its eating, its hearing a hammer, its hearing a child playing a game while youre trying to listen to a profound talk on the dharma. Which would you rather listen to? Which is the true dharma? So nothing is a distraction; everything that comes, we enter there.

The other point is the gratitude for the Way. Over and over again that comes up. It comes with tears; it comes with joy; it comes with laughter. It is a great healing force. We were given life, and we are not even sure that we asked for it. We were given the dharma, and Im not sure we deserved it. Fortunately, there was nothing we could do to deserve it! It just came upon us; it inflicted itself upon us

in the guise of some catastrophe that sent us running here. It is good to be grateful in that way, to be grateful for the things that we have and for the things that we dont have. As Yun-men said, it is better to have nothing than to have something good. Out of that nothing, everything comes; that one good thing can become a prison. We have that gratitude for everything that comes by, and that goes on and on, so we just walk the Way. And whatever comes up, it doesnt really matter; we cant complain that this is not the Way: it is plainly the Way. We can say we dont like itbut so what? Its plainly the Way. And if our hearts have never been broken, we cant walk the Way; were still too innocent. And thats no excuse. The Tao will then break our hearts for us, so that we can walk the Way. So whatever comes up, thats it. Walking is it, disappointment is it, joy is it, and underneath it all you will find that great sleeping dragon of joy that is always there, snoring away underneath your life, making everything golden.

NOTE: The quotations in this Teisho, given on Day 6 of the Easter Sesshin at Gorricks Run, 1994 are taken from "The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi", translated by Burton Watson, Shambhala, 1993.

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