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"Process and Experience of Enlightenment" - a provisional title of
an originally untitled teisho.

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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JOHN TARRANT ROSHI

TEISHO delivered during a ROHATSU SESSHIN
December 5, 1992 Camp Cazadero, California

(Tape starts mid sentence.)

. . . saw the morning star, gained enlightenment, and said, "Now I see
that all
beings of the great earth have in the same moment attained the way."

In the book of the Denko-roku ("The Transmission of the Light"), which is
the
first koan book, there's a poem by Keizan Jokin that goes with this case
(i.e.
Case 1 of Denko-roku "Shakyamuni Buddha"):

"One branch from the old plum tree extends splendidly forth.
Thorns become attached to it in time."

Please sit comfortably.

This is one of the primary legends in our particular tradition and this
is the
time of year when we traditionally celebrate the enlightenment
experience. The
zen tradition is that each person actually has that experience of the
Buddha.
You don't have to believe in the Buddha, better if you don't. What you
have to

do is have that experience for yourself so that you can know for yourself what coffee tastes like and you will not ever again have to read descriptions of what coffee tastes like.

The tradition is that Shakyamuni tried a lot of different paths, including a very ascetic path without eating and became just a living skeleton, but found that that wasn't the way and he accepted nourishment. Somebody offered him some milk and he drank the milk. We might symbolically see that as allowing whatever cows represent into his life, too. Some sort of nurturance, some sort of earthiness. So he accepted the milk and sat up all night, and in the morning he looked up and for the first time he truly saw the morning star. That's the moment when he said, "At the same moment I and all beings of the universe have attained the way." There are different versions of what he said and this is essentially a zen version of his enlightenment story.

So today, I'd like to talk some about enlightenment and what I think it is and what I think it isn't and share with you some stories about this tradition of enlightenment that we have. I want to remind you first of the story from yesterday about Yŷn-men Wen-Yen (Jap. Ummon Bun'en), who was the guy who broke his leg when he was enlightened. Yesterday we talked about Lin-chi's (Jap. Rinzai) enlightenment story. The head monk Mu-chou Tao-ming (Jap. Bokushu Domei). said, "Why don't you go along to the teacher and ask this question" over and over again and Lin-chi could get nowhere. Eventually, through that head monk's initial help he became a great master. Yŷn-men came to that head monk much later in the head monk's life when he was about a hundred. The story is told in a number of places. This is the Blue Cliff Record version of the story.

Mu-chou spun devices that turned like lightning so it was difficult to approach and linger. Whenever he received someone, he would grab him as soon as he crossed the threshold and say, "Speak! Speak!", and if there wasn't a reply he'd just push him out saying, "An ancient drill is just turning in a rut."

It took Yŷn-men three times before he got let in. And then, as soon as Mu-chou said, "Who's there?", and Yŷn-men answered, "Me!" Mu-chou opened the

door a little and Yŷn-men immediately bounded in (showing his spirit).

Mu-chou, holding fast, said, "Speak! Speak!" Yŷn-men hesitated and was pushed out and still had one foot inside when Mu-chou slammed the door breaking his leg. As Yŷn-men cried out in pain, he was suddenly greatly enlightened. Subsequently the trend of his words, his whole style emerged from Mu-chou.

After this, eventually Mu-chou directed Yŷn-men to go to Hsŷeh-feng I-ts'un (Jap. Seppo Gison). So Mu-chou decided that he couldn't teach Yŷn-men much further. So this is one of the first things to point out here that while Yŷn-men, who really is one of the greatest figures in all of zen, had a very profound enlightenment experience, his teacher didn't think that that was enough. Mr. Reginald Blyth, the haiku translator and the person, really, who taught Aitken Roshi about zen in prison during the war with Japan, compared Yŷn-men to Goethe or Shakespeare in his culture. He thought of him as one of those figures who transcends national culture. But even so, after his enlightenment, he had to go and keep working at it.

He arrived at Hsŷeh-feng's place and said, "What is Buddha?" and Hsŷeh-feng said, "Stop talking in your sleep." And Yŷn-men then bowed and he lived there for three years.

One day Hsŷeh-feng asked him, "What is your perception?" Yŷn-men said, "My view doesn't differ in the slightest from that of all sages since antiquity."

For twenty years Ling-shu Jŷ-min did not appoint a head monk. He used to say, "Now my head monk was born today." And all that time he had his head monk's quarters vacant.

Then he would say, "My head monk is tending oxen" like a young boy in the fields.

Then later he would say, "My head monk is travelling around on pilgrimage."

Suddenly, one day he ordered the bell to be struck for everyone to assemble so that people could receive the head monk at the gate. The congregation was rather dubious about this, but Yŷn-men actually arrived (a ragged man with a limp). Ling-shu immediately invited him into the head monk's quarters to unpack his bundle.

Ling-shu Jŷ-min was an unusual person.

One day the local lord was going to mobilize his army and didn't go to the monastery personally to ask the master to determine whether conditions were favorable or not. Ling-shu didn't want to be part of any of this.

Either way, you know, there's just no good advice you can give sometimes when somebody's planning war.

He knew this before hand and sat down and died.

The lord arrived and said angrily, "Since when was the master sick?"

The attendant said, "The master hadn't been sick. He had just entrusted a box to me which he ordered me to present to your majesty when you arrived.

The Lord of Kwangtung opened the box and took out a card which said, "The eye of humans and devas. A living buddha is the head monk in the hall."

Then the Lord of Kwangtung calmed down, dismissed his soldiers, and invited Yŷn-men to lead the monastery.

I tell you that story to indicate some of the twists and turns of the dharma and some of the mysterious nature of the dharma. I think the most mysterious thing is not Ling-shu's wonderful foreknowledge, but Yŷn-men actually breaking his leg and finding that an opportunity for enlightenment. So that circumstances that are harsh, as well as benign, can be awakening devices for us.

To take off on this theme. . . The tradition of Buddhism started we assume around the time of Shakyamuni, and very much emphasized renunciation at first. If you read old Buddhist texts, or if you study Buddhism in Asia, you can't avoid the awareness of the importance of renunciation as an issue in Buddhism. I sometimes think of this as the foundation. This is the ordeal quality that comes with any great learning. That you will have to give up something if you want to practice the dharma well. If you want to become enlightened. In the initial traditions of Buddhism this was a very literal thing. The idea was you couldn't really become enlightened or have a happy life without giving up everything, without living uncertainty, and certainly as a celibate person

begging enough food for one day and no more. And each day going out begging and if you didn't get the food, you went hungry. So that was really the idea of renouncing all certainty and protection, in a sense, in this life. And there was very much the idea that lay people didn't quite make it. They had to wait for a favorable rebirth when they could be become monks or nuns.

As Buddhism progressed some people stopped taking renunciation so literally and started to see it more as an inner matter. There was a great split in Buddhism and these people founded the Mahayana school, which we are members of. And they thought that you could actually be quite asleep, you could follow all the monastic rules perfectly and still be a donkey. And while there can be a laudable intention in renunciation, it doesn't always achieve what is wanted by itself. The Mahayana was founded on the renunciation, but was something else. It was a castle built in the desert. And the Mahayana came out with the idea that whether you are a lay person or a priest or a nun, enlightenment is equally available to everyone no matter what your circumstances. There is no special fortune you must have in this life that makes enlightenment available to you. So you can see this is a very democratic move in some ways--that you don't need to have any special fate. Enlightenment is always available. Renunciation, then, came to be seen more as sort of inner fasting. You might call it a fasting of the heart rather than of the body in which we just don't cling to things. The old zen saying is, "The great way is not difficult, if just avoids picking and choosing." It avoids comparison. It avoids praise and blame.

So there is a great discipline in renunciation as the foundation of zen. I think it is very much an inward matter. At first, I think the primary element of the renunciation is in our attention. We stop following the mind road so that when you hear a bird call and you begin to think of the last time you heard a bird call, and you remember when you were in a forest and saw a beautiful pheasant, and then you think about a caged bird and feel sorrowful for all the caged birds in the world, and then you think, well, maybe I'm a kind of caged bird, and then you think well I can sing anyway. That is the mind road and it's not much use. So there is a renunciation that needs to happen there where we

don't follow that well-worn groove in the mind. That the mind when it is doing that is not lively. It is not immediate and vivid. It is just plodding along like the old donkey it is. Sort of like an ox grinding corn in a traditional village. Just plodding around and around and wearing a furrow in the ground. So we renounce that sort of ox-headed quality about our lives. And actually, that's the great difficulty, the most difficult thing to renounce, really, truly. Who knows how active the mind is in offering routines to us and sort of conventional things. Flaubert, the great French novelist, actually made a dictionary of received ideas which he thought were those idiotic, pompous things that everybody believes. And it's rather shocking when we begin to see how many of those received ideas we just have and how much we just run our lives by them and make major decisions by them. In zen we let go of those opinions. An opinion and ninety cents will get you a cup of coffee. So we let them go. And then you can see that in renunciation there is an act of courage because we have to let them go without knowing what will take their place. Because if we know what will take their place, we're not letting them go. We can't get there from here. And what will take their place is something very magical and shining and vivid, but we can't have it until we let go of what we've got.

I think, again, it was Yŷn-men who said, "It was better to have nothing than to have something good." So that is the renunciation of zen. And that's the equivalent of Shakyamuni fasting until his bones showed through his skin. His skin just hung on him. The equivalent of those people who cut off a finger to indicate their sincerity (it's a common thing in some cultures) in the way. You don't have to cut off a finger. It's actually much harder to cut off the mind road so I recommend you go straight to that.

But the renunciation also gives us, I think, a certain. . . We have to be prepared to renounce. We get a certain equanimity with circumstances in zen that really is like the old ascetics in some way. You know it rains, oh, so it rains; it's sunny, so it's sunny. I'm happy today or I'm dying today. That's very interesting. There is an equanimity with the rise and fall of the waves of

the world. And that's really true. We really do get that. And the wave will come through and something will happen. We'll be sad or we lose our temper or something like that, but then it is gone and a new wave is coming through and we don't cling to the past wave. Even if we were stupid, we don't cling to that. Even if we were very successful, we don't hold that either.

In the Mahayana people built up the idea of the bodhisattva and the legend of the bodhisattva is of one who really knows what her purpose is in this world. It is to enlighten and to save other beings. The bodhisattva in the legend, also puts off her own complete enlightenment. A bodhisattva is greatly enlightened, but not completely and utterly enlightened because that would mean she would instantly disappear from this universe and go and live in a pure land teaching people who are almost there instead of us struggling beings. I've thought much about this over the years, this legend, of the idea of putting off your own enlightenment which seems rather dumb, really, when you think about it. How can you help people by being stupid? The very core of zen is the idea that if you are enlightened, your action will be freer and truer and more helpful and if you are not enlightened it's not much use trying to run around the world acting if you don't ever take any time for inwardness. Your actions will go sour and your good actions will not help people because your eye will not be clear enough to see how to help people. You'll be declaring war on things.

So what I came to, and I think this is a solid reading of that myth, is the idea that the bodhisattva is open to and vulnerable to the world in order to join with us. That if we are to be a bodhisattva, we have to be open to being touched by other people. Otherwise, we cannot connect with them and we cannot help them. And if we are opened to being touched, of course, we're open to being harmed and we have to let go of our complete perfection or we'll never get there. So we have to be at ease in the waves of the world rather than trying to flatten them all out. You can see how this view would lead us to believe that you could practice as a bodhisattva as a lay person rather than just as a clerical person. That you can practice as a bodhisattva no matter what you are doing since all circumstances are equally bad and equally confused and

turbulent. You notice how in sesshin we try to control things and sesshin is actually quite a structured environment according to our usual patterns, but you also notice how everything is always out of control in sesshin, too. There is always this sort of creative chaos that goes on in the kitchen and machines go on at the wrong time and obliterate your quiet zazen. Logistics are always breaking down because that is the way of things. Gregory Bateson's daughter asked him, "Daddy, why are things in a mess?" and he pointed out to her that we have very few ideas of what was orderly, but very many ideas of what was messy so things were much more likely to be in a mess than to be orderly. He illustrated that by arranging things on a mantelpiece. But things are always in a mess and the bodhisattva finds a harmony within that.

In Mahayana thought there were some great developments. There was a whole school called mind only which came to the realization that there is that great underlying basis of everything, the great fundamental ground of being, which is what we call emptiness when we chant the "Heart Sutra." And that this is an experience that just comes over us in meditation sometimes. Everything is taken away. This is the true renunciation. It is not an act of will, but an act of understanding. Even to say understanding is saying too much. It's like the moon reflected in the water. It's an instantaneous reflection. The water doesn't think about it and then reflect the moon. It's just like a mirror. So the moonlight is this fundamental ground of being, but it's also intangible. It can't directly be touched. But everything is held in this and we can speak of the compassion of the ground of being, that it holds us and whenever we come home, there it is. It is always there. Whenever we gather our attention, it is always there. And while it is nothing at all, we can rest in it. This is a vivid experience of zazen and also something that you can cling to and destroy you and yourself with it, of course, like everything else.

As the Mahayana went on, people began to develop even more sophisticated images. Perhaps the height of this was the Flower Garland School, which is the Hua-yen (Jap. Kegon) School of Buddhism, which saw that not only are all the things of

the world reflected in the mind, but the mind completely appears in all those things in the world. So the idea of interpenetration arose. If you've ever read or sat with Thich Nhat Hanh, he's very influenced by this idea and talks about it a lot. For him it is the source of all social action. The idea that each being is actually all other beings. The universe is the great net of Indra, is one of the metaphors, and each place the net crosses over, there is a jewel and each jewel holds a reflection of all other jewels. There is a great luminous world here in which each object is alive and vibrant and containing all other objects and at the same time the subject-object boundary is, of course, quite broken down.

About that time philosophy seems to have run out in zen. I think it was a great achievement, that tradition, and something I'm still trying to quite fathom, I think, but also it got kind of fancy and got away people's direct experience. So in zen there is always the move back to direct experience. So that Wu-men Hui'kai (Jap. Mumon Ekai) says, and he's quoting an ancient saying, "When you meet the Buddha on the road; kill the Buddha." Because the Buddha is no use to you. If you are not the Buddha, the Buddha is just a kind of poison. He also said, "Wash your mouth out with soap and water when you speak the word, 'Buddha'."

So this is the enlightenment experience when you completely let go of all your ideas and delusions because they are a kind of veil in front of you. There's nothing wrong, really, with walking around with a veil. You still contain every other being in the universe, but if you want to know for yourself, if you want to experience the joy, then you have to fast in that way and let go of that veil. Let go of something good until you have nothing and then the joy will appear.

So I'll talk a little, perhaps, about enlightenment experience. I gave a talk in Berkeley about a week ago and I spent about two minutes talking about enlightenment and it was a rather long talk and almost ninety percent of the questions I was asked were about enlightenment. And so I thought, "Gee, I should wash my mouth out with soap and water for mentioning the word." But let

me mention it and I'll wash my mouth out later.

The idea of enlightenment is the idea of a transforming experience and the experience transforms our point of view. A lot of people focus on the ecstatic qualities of zen experience, but in the tradition we're not that interested in ecstatic qualities. We're somewhat interested in them as a kind of consequence of a real experience, but they themselves are not diagnostic of whether the experience is real. People can get ecstatic over the most amazing nonsense. Look at the history of any religion and you'll find these wonderful ecstatic people who have not a clue about anything. Running around killing each other because their enemies are heretical. But there is a characteristic of the experience as joy. Tung-shan's master asked him, I think it was Tung-shan's master, said, "Are you joyful yet?" And he said, "It's as though I found a pearl in a pile of shit." You see, what's the pile of shit is the mind road itself. Again, you see the Hua-yen, the idea that the mind, the great eternal ground, the original face itself appears in you. It appears in the grass. It appears in the old piano in the corner. It doesn't appear anywhere else except in a pile of shit; fortunately, doesn't appear anywhere else. So there is no way beyond where you are that you'll find eternity, but you will find it if you look. So that was his joy.

The other thing is that enlightenment seems to afflict some people whether they look for it or not. And occasionally you'll find somebody, Mrs Flora Courtois is a good example in the (zen) literature. She just sweats life and has an enlightenment experience. Because they worry about eternity so much it somehow comes over them. Some people will just walk into a zendo and just sit for. . . I knew somebody who came to a zendo and at her first zazenkaï she came along and was chanting the "Kannon Gyo" and had an enlightenment experience. She didn't even know the words. She had to hold the sutra book and that's one of the easiest sutras to learn, so you can see how new she was. This was the first time she'd ever chanted and she had an enlightenment experience. But that's kind of a disadvantage when that happens. I think it was for her, or she felt

it was, because there's not enough containment yet to hold it. And what she realized, she saw that everything was taken away. She saw the emptiness side of things and she burst into tears and she didn't have the joy. While she could see something, it wasn't yet enough.

I think what happens with the enlightenment experience is that we do our zazen faithfully and we work within the structure of the precepts however we can. I think that structure is very helpful and gradually we deepen. And some people work with a koan, which I think is very helpful, and some people have these Boom! experiences, Kaboom! And other people don't. Other people just gradually open wider and wider. Some people don't even work with a koan and they just open wider and wider and they become very deep and serene and very clear in that way. So there is no orthodox way to become enlightened.

In zen the idea of sudden enlightenment has been very strong. There is a truth to that because if you're going to change your stance in the world, it completely changes. The suddenness refers to the utter nature of the change. If you're not going to follow the mind road anymore, you just don't follow the mind road and it's a complete change. It's like an egg can't be partly rotten. It's all rotten. It's not good in parts. So there is a suddenness for some people, but for other people in time the suddenness is the complete change of view, but actually they change very slowly and then deepen and get richer over time and sometimes this is a better way because all the time you put in sweating and being stupid is very valuable. And the time you put in not being stupid is not as valuable, which is why the great D. T. Suzuki's dharma name was Daisetz or Great Donkey. So his teacher must have thought very highly of him, I think, to give him such a name.

I've seen different kinds of enlightenment experiences so I'll talk about a few I've seen over the years. I have one friend who had a very classical sort of experience, the kind that people like to write up and publish in books because it's all very neat and orderly and makes you think everybody has that experience. He was training and he was going along and working at his job. He was a school teacher, I think, at that time, and he'd come and sit sesshin

whenever he could and he'd sit a lot. He felt himself to be just getting deeper. And he was the sort of a person who really didn't ask a lot of questions. He worked on the koan Mu and he just worked with that koan and sat a lot and felt that he really didn't have a clue, but that if he kept sitting, it would get better. And, really, it didn't. He didn't get any wiser, he thought, but he did get more serene and became happier gradually and that often happens in zazen, very often you do become happier. Then things started to happen. Like the tanto hit the wall with the stick making that crack sound that tanto's love to make. He jumped off his cushion before he even noticed. He just sort of levitated and fell back down. Then a bird would call and it would go right through him and he would feel like he could hear it calling for hours. Occasionally he'd get excited when he had this experience, but it would go away again. But he felt like he was resonating and for a long time he was like that. He was like a string that's quite taut and even if it's touched a little bit, it will shake, but it didn't really sing out yet. On the last night of sesshin he was in this rather deep place, but quite happy and not thinking about enlightenment, of course. He was studying with Aitken Roshi and Aitken Roshi for some reason, nobody remembers now, had used the words 'headless corpses and corpseless heads,' to make some point in teisho, an absurd phrase. The student was sitting up in the dojo and people were sleeping in it because it was very crowded and people were snoring and people and people snore in different overtones, you know. He was sitting there alone meditating with all this snoring around him and this phrase, 'headless corpses and corpseless heads' started going around and around in his mind, mixed with the snores and the snores started saying this. He's sitting there all alone meditating pretty happily and the whole world's turning into this absurd saying, going round and round in his mind and the snores and everything. Then after he kind of got sick of this and decided that that was enough and it felt right and he went to bed. He went to bed and then he just turned over, still in bed, and the whole world just turned over, and he said, "Ah!" So then he sort of shrugged and went to sleep. And then he got up in the morning and everything was shining. Every object in the world was shining. He felt this great joy and love and everything was shining and glowing. It was like that for weeks. And so then he went to

Aitken Roshi and couldn't communicate this at all. It was six months before they managed to find a way to talk about it in the koan language. But it didn't matter to him--either of them--but it didn't matter to him because he had had this experience. He had his joy.

So that's a fairly classical experience of the deep kind. I know other people who really sit. There are people I've worked with that I really didn't even give a koan to and I just got to sit and who gradually became wiser and wiser and wiser that way until one day they realized they'd gone the other side of the gate. That is a completely other way to do it. It's not very dramatic and it's hard to describe how it happens because you just walk, live along your life. But that is an equally important way to have the dharma, to experience the dharma. Where you know there is something, a way in which you are out of harmony with the Tao so you shift so that you are in harmony with the Tao and that's all you do. You just do these little shifts all the time and sooner or later you realize that you are the Tao and the Tao is you and it is not a matter of being in harmony with it at all.

In my own--I don't usually like to talk about my own experience, but it's sort of distant now. I think it's sometimes often important to protect an enlightenment experience and not talk about it. You want to be very careful with it. When I had my own experience, I didn't tell anybody for about six months, I guess. I told my teacher, but I didn't tell anybody else until I'd settled down a little bit. In my own experience I had really always wanted to be enlightened and I'd had this really strong sense of effort and struggle. I'd gone to each sesshin thinking, "I will do it this time." I would really meditate very hard. I think as I got deeper in my zazen, I got happier and I didn't really care so much if I got enlightened and I realized that I was living the great life in my ignorance, which is again, an essential thing of the Hua-yen, isn't it? That each object in the universe contains all other objects, each object manifests the radiance of Buddha nature. So whether you're working on Mu or whether you're sitting there asleep and snoring on your cushion, you still manifest the dharma, but it's good to know it and you don't know it yet.

Not knowing in that sense, then, can be painful. So it's good to wake up the desire for the way, but then the desire itself becomes a problem, as it did for me. I had to back myself off in my zazen and stop being so tense and stop struggling so much. I used to throw up all the time. I'd be so tense, I'd rush out at kinhin and throw up, rush back and do more zen. It was sort of just another ritual, you know. I did that for a year or so, I guess, a couple of years. Finally, I thought, "Well, there must be another way." And I got to just enjoying my zazen. I decided I'd be lazy in my zazen, actually. But I couldn't be lazy. What happened was I stopped the interfering mind and the of zazen started doing me. In this particular sesshin I had this dream beforehand that I thought was very significant. In the dream I went past the bones of the ancestral saints on foot. I was in a car and it broke down and I had to proceed on foot. Then I saw some senior students. (Again the importance of friends, rather than the rules and the teacher.) Some senior students showed me the way to a mountain that nobody knew of. It was a secret mountain, but it was the highest mountain in land. They showed me the way up. And all the children were coming down from that mountain into the world to be born and I was going up. I got to the place where the children came from. In the dream I had an ice cream cone and I was licking it. Well, I felt somehow this dream seemed a good sign. So often you'll get intimations like that, but you can't hang onto them because if you hang onto them, you just step backwards. So I felt odd about the dream. But I went into sesshin determined this time I was going to do it. I had a really good first couple of days and then my mind went all to shit, like I'd never had worse zazen in my whole life. The more I tried the worse it got. So I thought, "Well, I just won't try." I'd built up such a head of steam that not trying was good for me; whereas, earlier in my practice I had to try because I would have just stopped practicing otherwise. Then this experience just came over me then. I just couldn't help it. I was just sitting in the dojo laughing. Aitken Roshi had just asked me one of his silly questions that he was always asking me. Only this time I went back to the dojo and started laughing

at the question. I still didn't know the answer, but I just laughed and laughed at the question. He asked me, "What is the height of the Mu?" I remember. And so I laughed and laughed quietly to myself because I didn't want to disturb other people and it came over me, "I know the answer to that question." And I thought, "Well, there's no need to go in and tell him, is there?" So I sat there for a day or so laughing to myself and eventually I went into dokusan and answered his question and his eyes got big. He asked me a whole lot of other questions which I could answer, but I still didn't know what I was answering. So this went on for a few dokusan and he asked me Hakuin's question about the sound of one hand, which had always rather terrified me. I'd always thought, "I hope I get through koan study without having to do that one." Knowing I'd never pass it and it would embarrass me horribly. I'd be proved to be a fake. This is true. When I was in Australia and I was working without a teacher and I was working on Mu, I was going under general anesthetic for some minor surgery and I decided that it would be a good time to really work on a koan and I chose that koan. And I still remember going under the anesthetic going, "What is the sound a single hand?" sort of circling around me which absolutely wasn't any use at all, of course. I don't know. Maybe it helped. I came out with the koan, too, I remember. I was still stupid. Anyway, Aitken Roshi held out his hand at one stage when he asked me this question and the whole world opened up for me. I was in the dokusan room, this very little room on Maui. I remember the stars and the great wind of the universe. Everything was in that room. He was Hakuin and then I was Hakuin and I met Hakuin in that fashion. I answered all his questions, but it took me a long time to digest that. I actually went out and made a complete mess of my life for a few years. I think that's a common experience. That in a way I couldn't hold it. I didn't know what to do with my inner character work to hold this experience I had had. I, in fact, avoided being a leader for a long time even after I'd had that experience because I felt I just wasn't fit to help people and I had to digest what had happened. And so it goes on like that. That you have to really let it go and throw it away.

Anything you hold onto really becomes another veil in front of you. This is one of the deepest truths of zen. It is not so hard to realize the world of emptiness, but to really express it is the great thing and the great work. That is why we can make mistakes and be stupid afterwards. But the bodhisattva way says that we actually have to make that mistake. We have to go out into the world to try and help beings and gradually we learn and the enlightened action does come more truly through us.

I'll tell one last story because it occurs to me I forgot to tell a story about a woman by mistake. This is a neat story about a friend of mine who had her enlightenment experience. I was training with her and she had hers about six months or so before I'd had mine. She was a person who as a child had been very unhappy and had a very difficult childhood, but had lived on the edge of town and had gone out into the forest alone a lot, or into the woods alone a lot, and had had certain experiences, of the kind we had in childhood, you know, most of us have had, where the subject-object difference broke down and she just became the tree or the moss or the stones. She had always remembered this and then had found zen and realized that this was a way to enter that world, to consolidate that world. So she really, badly wanted to get enlightened and was really gung ho, and nothing she did really helped. She'd meditate, but sesshin after sesshin she wouldn't be enlightened afterwards and be very disappointed and depressed. As I used to be, too. There was nothing worse than the closing ceremony of sesshin, I remember. Some of the worst moments of my life. I see people going through it now and I just feel for them so much. So anyway, she really flung herself into it and she had a real gift for meditation. I always thought she had a better samadhi gift than I did. She flung herself into it and time and space disappeared for her on day one. That's what it looked from the inside and she went through the whole thing in a kind of trance. From the outside she was throwing up all the time and she had a fever and she had diarrhea. She was rooming with a bunch of women, about eight women in a big room, which fortunately had a bathroom. They would carry her to and from the zendo, to help her, and help her out of bed. She desperately wanted to get to the zendo and she'd start moving toward the zendo and they'd help her.

They'd carry her out of the zendo when she fell apart, when she was weeping with tears and snot. Suddenly, on about day five of sesshin, she was sitting in the dokusan line, which is in a big hall in Maui, and there was a big painting of Kuan-yin [Chinese version of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara] in front of her on the wall. The dokusan room was set up so you looked at that wall and the painting and then you walked around the corner to go to dokusan. She was sitting there looking at the wall, and she suddenly realized she was looking at the wall, which was her first moment of consciousness in five days. She realized that the wall came down and exactly met the floor and then she burst out laughing. That was her enlightenment realization. The wall meets the floor! She ran into the roshi laughing and told him, "The wall meets the floor!"

One of the things I want to emphasize here is the plainness and the ordinariness of what we discover. After all there's nothing much to Huang-po's [Huang-po Hsi-yŷn (Jap. Obaku Kiun)] dharma, is there? After all the wall meets the floor. The crow goes, 'caw, caw.' The birds just go, 'cheep, cheep; cheep, cheep.' Everything is plain and clear before your eyes.

I tell you these stories because I think the heart likes to hear stories sometimes and not just be told do more zazen and shut up. But actually do more zazen and shut up are the best instructions. Don't cling to the stories because really it will be different for you. Really some people do open slowly.

One of Aitken Roshi's virtues is his candor, I have always thought. I think it may be published in one of his books. It's the story about his own lack of enlightenment experience. Something shifted in him during a sesshin once in the mid sixties with Soen Nakagawa Roshi. Soen Roshi gave a "Kaatz!" in the dojo and Aitken Roshi found himself joining in. This "Kaatz!" came out of him. Aitken Roshi was very good about dojo behavior so it was not the sort of thing he was wont to do, but this "Kaatz!" came out of him. He was sitting facing in and Soen Roshi had him turnaround and he hit him with the kyasaku over and over again and calling out "Kaatz! Kaatz! Kaatz!" in the dojo. Aitken Roshi was just exhausted after all that and went to bed and this Kaatz! just kept coming out of him. But then nothing happened, you know. And so he felt like, "Well,

back to the zafu," and went on. He essentially considered himself a zen failure for many years, as I'm sure you know. I'm not telling you anything he hasn't written about publicly. I think that's something precious and dear about him.

A true donkey. He trained with great teachers--with Soen Roshi and Gempo Yamamoto Roshi and Hakuun Yasutani Roshi. They kept handing him down saying, "Train this guy." Finally, Koun Yamada Roshi inherited him and he was sitting there listening to a story about a koan about a rhinoceros where Enkan (I can't remember his Chinese name, [Yen-kuan Ch'i-an (Jap. Enkan Saian)]) says, "Bring me the rhinoceros fan." And his attendant said, "It's broken." Enkan says, "Well, bring me the rhinoceros." And Aitken Roshi said, "I could bring him the rhinoceros." This wonder came over him. He told one of the leaders. The leader said, "Well, you'd better have a talk with the Roshi. I'll arrange dokusan." Yamada Roshi said, "Well, you've had an experience of some kind, perhaps, long ago, but only now has it come to fruition." There was no great emotion for him.

If you read the enlightenment stories of the people who became great teachers, they're always flamboyant enlightenment experiences; but if you read the history of those people's sanghas, the sanghas often suffered a lot and their character work often wasn't done and often they exploited their students in various ways.

Aitken Roshi's been very good about that stuff. So there's something to be said for being a slow, foolish person, That when it goes in, it goes deep. As Yŷn-men says, "It's better to have nothing than to have something good." So be very patient with who you are, be very honest with who you are. It is enough to be truly and deeply and utterly who you are. That will always open the way for you. Trying to be somebody else or to have somebody else's enlightenment experience is just another veil in front of you and you can't ever get there from here. Naturally, there will be veils and that's okay, too. Be patient with yourself and your veils.

I have spoken so intimately and candidly today to try to encourage you. I don't want this tape distributed and I'd like you not to talk loosely about the kind of experiences I've told you today, if you don't mind, because people will

misunderstand hearing it out of the sesshin context. We don't want to mislead people. People always cling to the flamboyance of the experience and they forget that it comes from just this moment, just being who I am. "The wall meets the floor!" That's it. That's it. Oh, now, the bell goes and it is time to cook. That's it. I go and cook.

You know, when I had my experience, I was a server and the head server was a woman, who is still a buddy of mine, who had had an enlightenment experience under Koboyu (sp???) Roshi [Kobori Roshi ? - tmc] in Japan years before, but she had had a great emptiness experience and it had never really flowered. In that sesshin she became happy and got the joy of it. We could tell something was going on with each other and we were both sitting up late at night out on the porch among the mosquitos and neither of us cared. We were just sitting up there. Every night I'd come out and she'd be there, or she'd come out and I'd be there. We started to laugh a little about this. She whispered to me when we were serving once, "There's nothing to realize! There's nothing to realize!" I didn't have a clue what she meant, but I was very pleased she took me into her confidence. Years later I think I know what she meant. But I could tell she knew it; she understood.

So, those are a few stories for you. It was always the ordinariness. I think compassion is something that gets opened in the way, when we are really into the way. That is something. You can check in on your own compassion and see how your doing. That's another judge. There should be a kind of spontaneous sense of opening into the Tao and opening to other people.

Tonight we're not going to do any special night sitting for tonight officially. What we're going to do is invite you to sit for yourselves as so many people have over the years if you wish to sit up. Just sit for yourselves. The leaders will give you instruction about that. I want to emphasize again that this is your matter. This is something that comes out of your own heart and covers the valley and covers the whole continent. It doesn't come from being anybody else than who you are. You can't ever drink anybody else's coffee. You

can't ever have anybody else's experience or anybody else's love. It must be your own and start from your own breast.

Thank you very much. Please keep at it.

Some supplementary notes:

Ling-shu Jÿ-min, Jÿ-min (?-?). Teacher. Head of the Ling-shu Monastery (in Shao-chou, Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province. China.). Recommended his head monk, Yÿn-men Wen-yen (J. Unmon Bun'en) as his successor in directing the monastery. Active 9th c. China. [see pp. 283 in: Chang Chung-Yuan (Transl. and Ed.). 1969. Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism selected from The Transmission of the Lamp. New York: Pantheon Books.]

In the Zen tradition there are two Zen teachers called Tung-shan:
1) Tung-shan Liang-chieh (Jap. Tozan Ryokai) who was the student and dharma successor of Yun-yen T'an-sheng (Jap. Ungan Donjo) and was the co-founder [together with his disciple Ts'ao-shan Pen-chi (Jap. Sozan Honjaku)] of the Soto school of Zen; 2) Tung-shan Shou-chu (Jap. Tozan Shusho), the student and dharma successor of Yÿn-men Wen-yen (Jap. Ummon Bun'en).

Detailed circumstances of the contemporary case of a spontaneous enlightenment are given in: Courtois, Flora. 1986. An experience of enlightenment. Wheaton.

Ill: The Theosophical Publishing House, A Quest Book.

Kobori Nanrei [Nanrai] Sohaku (1918-). Teacher. Rinzai line. Tea ceremony master. Painter. Abbot of RyTMkTMin. Head of Ryokoin temple at Daitokuji. Former director of First Zen Institute of America in Japan. (tmc 7.03.93)

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