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"ATTAINING THE LIGHT AND DARK" - 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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TEISHO

John Tarrant Roshi

February 17, 1992

Center for Seven Generations

Occidental, California

Today's talk is about attaining the light and attaining the dark.

Please sit comfortably.

Everybody wants to attain the light, have it shining and radiant  
and to see the connection with all beings at all times. And in  
your zazen that does not happen by clinging to the light.

Ultimately what happens is that you start letting things go.

Even letting things go is doing too much. When you start letting  
things go, the lake begins to settle and the water clarifies

itself. There is nothing you can do to clarify the Tao; it is already clear. And so, it doesn't really matter what happens to you. If you get thrown in prison, this might not be considered a good idea, but who knows? Some people have a child and they didn't expect to; some people lose a child and they didn't expect to. All these ups and downs of the way. Getting thrown out of work; having a job you can't stand. Many things. They are all openings and gates of the way. And the light is just as bright there as in the sweet things, looking at narcissus flowers blooming in the rain, that's easy.

Bodhidharma was considered--or somewhat considered--the founder of Chan or Zen in China and there are many different legends about him. He seems to have been Indian and to have come, perhaps, by sea to China to spread the dharma. He speaks of two major ways of entering the practice. Many roads lead to the path, but basically there are only two. This translator calls it "reason," but I think it's prajna and practice. "To enter by reason means to realize the essence through instruction and to understand that all living things share the same true nature which isn't apparent because it's shrouded by sensation and delusion. Those who turn back to reality, who meditate, who know the absence of self and other, the oneness of ordinary people and wise people, and remain unmoved even by sutras," (especially by sutras) "they are in unspoken agreement with the Tao. Without moving, without effort they enter, we say, in that way."

One old Chinese teacher had a particularly promising student. Nobody else knew he was promising, but the teacher thought he was promising.

He said, "You know, I can help you if you want, but you have to want it."

The student said, "Well, I'm willing to do anything."

The teacher said, "Well, I'll give you the medicine that veterinarians use to bring dead horses back to life."

The student said, "Okay."

The teacher said, "So don't bother coming to dokusan and all that nonsense trying to give me responses to my questions. Just let your mind become empty and pure like an old tree in the mountains. Then, if you're slow, in ten years something will happen; if you're medium, maybe seven years; if you're fast, maybe three." Just like that complete instructions. That's it. Off you go.

The student went through his day eating, working, cooking, whatever, meditating, and one night he was sitting up meditating late at night and I think he rolled up the blinds and suddenly the whole light of the universe dawned over him. He was so excited. He went to see the teacher--he couldn't tell whether it was day or night and he realized when he got there it was the middle of the night and the teacher was sleeping. He rested his head up against a pillar and he couldn't help laughing.

The teacher came out. "Who's laughing outside my door at midnight?" And he knew immediately what it was.

Eventually, that student became a great teacher.

So that is entering the way directly. No props, no handles. And you can tell that sesshin, in a way, encourages this way. Just enter; just now. And that's what we usually call the insight path. And it's very deep and very profound.

But then the insight path, I think, is maybe half of our work. The other side of the path is something the Chinese are also very much interested in which I keep calling the character side of the path. Some people develop the insight side and then have to go back and to fill in the character work. If our character is not deep enough and we do not have patience and we do not have a kind of grace of just flowing with circumstances, then the insight is like this marvelous water but we put it in a vessel that just leaks all the time and it flows through. So then you get people who actually have a genuine insight, but it doesn't stay--it's patchy--and can be dangerous to themselves and others.

Bodhidharma, so long ago, speaks about the other side, and he says, "This is entering by practice." And this has four all-inclusive methods. Suffering injustice is the first, you'll be glad to know. Adapting to conditions is the second. The third is seeking nothing. And the fourth is practicing the dharma, just in case you missed that along the way.

Suffering injustice. "When those who search for the path encounter adversity they should think to themselves. In countless ages gone by I have turned from the essential to the trivial and wandered through all manner of diversion. All manner of existence, often angry without cause and guilty of numberless transgressions, now that I do no wrong I am punished by my past. Neither gods nor human beings can foresee when an evil being will bear its fruit. I accept it with an open heart and without complaint of injustice."

This is finding the darkness. You know, it has taken me a long, long time to come to terms with the Purification gatha that we always chant at the beginning of our sutra service. There is something repulsive about it to me. "All the evil karma ever created by me since of old." There was something repulsive about it to me for a long time. I always thought it should be in there and I never knew why. I just knew there was something that seemed necessary, but it was also repulsive. I think that is the intractable difficulty in us it refers to. That the darkness, too, is here. Injustices will occur--small ones, like running out of food because you're at the end of the line in the meal, or great ones, being thrown into prison when you didn't do anything. Somebody leaves you, even though you love them well. Things like that. So I think of the evil karma as the material, the great matters of earth that we work with, the circumstances of our lives. Everybody has their own difficulty that they come to the dharma with. Some loss, perhaps, brought people to the dharma. Who knows what it is? Everybody has his or her own story and part of that story is always the sorrow that has brought us, but that sorrow is itself a kind of gate. That evil karma is itself primal stuff that gets converted. And when we actually walk into the light, see the light, then we realize we would not change the darkness of the past. Here we are everything just as it is light and dark. Sunlight and shadow.

The last thing on injustice. Bodhidharma says, "The sutras say when you meet with adversity, don't be upset; it makes sense.

Second, adapting to conditions. "As mortals we are ruled by conditions, not by ourselves. If we should be blessed by some

great rewards, such as fame or fortune, it is the fruit of the seed planted by us in the past. When conditions change it ends. Why delight in its existence? But while success and failure depend on conditions, the mind neither waxes nor wanes." So we cannot be attached to these things.

I was talking to my friend Stephen Mitchell, who's a dharma student and a writer, recently. Through no real fault of his own he's become quite well-known and successful. He was talking about an issue that was coming up in his practice. He has the idea that if you happen to have success come upon you, then you have to practice harder to survive. He had this change going on in his practice and he said, "Maybe it means that I'll just stop writing now." It didn't mean that for him, but that willingness to be unattached to what is important is a very important part and a very freeing part of the practice. Since writing has been his whole life--writing and other practices as well, but certainly has been a core practice for him.

So that willingness to let go of something. If it is in the Tao to let it go; and to grasp something if it is in the Tao is very important. Adapting to conditions. Silently following the path like a thief in the night, sneaking around corners, following it wherever it leads, invisible.

Third, according to Bodhidharma, is seeking nothing. People are always lying (?) for something, they're always seeking something out here. And we know that things out here don't always have a good taste even when we get them. We are not happy when we get what we want. If you get a new car, all you got was a car. It

doesn't matter whatever you change. Get a new city; all you get is a city. And that will not change you. "Everything is empty. Calamity always alternates with prosperity and the wise person is unmoved in the midst of this." Just flowing. "Peacefully living in a burning house."

Fourth, is practicing the dharma. "The dharma is the truth that all natures are pure." The dark and the light that come to us in circumstances. All are pure. The most irritating person in your life is your teacher. That person, too, is pure. "Since that which is real is also empty." He says, "Those who are wise give their body, their life, and their property without regret, without the vanity of giver, gift or recipient, without bias or attachment. To spread the light they teach others but without becoming attached to form. Through their own practice they are able to benefit others and glorify the way. While practicing all the virtues to eliminate delusion, they practice nothing at all. This is what is meant by practicing the dharma."

So I think that Bodhidharma is the very early form our way. And you can tell that it is already vigorous and cuts to the bone. He's already not too interested in piety and much more interested in the sacred. Later on as this became established, this point of view, it, too, became something that was a veil in front of people's minds. So people walk around saying silly things. One of you told me about a man who said, "I'm a Buddhist, therefore I have no ego, therefore I do not have to negotiate with you about my feelings because I do not have them." That sort of thing--a perversion of the way, but it is very common. I have some compassion for this person. I think we all have a little bit of

that longing for that sort of desolate place that has nothing to do with Nirvana. It's a place where nothing stirs--a place of death, really. But that is to assume that there is no mystery; that everything is known at this moment. It's also to assume our own virtue which is always a mistake. Since anything we cling to is just something we cling to. It just becomes another object that we are stuck on.

In later times these sayings then started to get used as koans--as pithy little jewel-like devices to help enlighten us. And they start to use the scriptures in this way. Here's a koan from the Enlightenment Scripture. This is from the Book of Serenity, Case 45.

"The scripture of "Perfect Enlightenment" says at all times do not produce delusive thoughts."

That's easy, just stop producing delusive thoughts. It's easier than you might think. Just don't do it.

"Also, don't stop and annihilate delusive states of mind." Don't annihilate delusive thoughts--that's harder.

"In realms of false conception don't add knowledge. Don't find reality in no knowledge."

So, great Master Nanquan (sp?)--then we move into the Fu-on (sp?) koan realm where there is no help; there are no ropes and ladders for you. But if you can just absorb it with yourselves, you know. It is much better than being able to recite scriptures. He was teaching a governor and the governor came to say goodbye to him because he'd been called away on state business.

Nanquan said to him, "How will you lead the people?"

The governor said, "I will lead them with the wisdom you

have taught me."

Nanquan said, "They will suffer horribly."

So yes, in realms of false conception don't add knowledge. Lao-Tse says, "When people fall away from the Tao, virtue and benevolence arise."

Nanquan also was very aware of the ways in which we try to discriminate between darkness and light--value one and dislike the other. He thought even death was interesting. Somebody asked him when he was dying,

"Where will you go after you die, Master?"

He said, "I shall be a water buffalo at the foot of the hill."

The student said, "I'll follow you, Master."

Nanquan said, "If you do, you must bring some grass in your mouth."

His great student was Chao-chou. He was a marvelous teacher and had more than one great student, but Chao-chou was one of his great students who gave us the curse and blessing of Chao-chou's Mu. One of his students asked him,

"Where will you go when you die, Master?"

Chao-chou said, "I shall go straight to hell."

The student said, "Oh, how virtuous. Your reverence doesn't deserve to go to hell."

Chao-chou said, "If I don't, who will teach you?"

So you see even in hell you know--there are Tantric paintings of even in hell there are these little red buddhas with demon horns and fangs and scowls around them, sort of preaching the dharma in

accessible form--adopting the custom of the country.

Nanquan also said to his assembly, "Buddhas of the past, present and future do not know it is. Cats and cows know it is."

As Chan developed, these kinds of dialogue became a very characteristic thing and people lost no opportunity to turn something into the dharma. So there was a slight air of danger about being around these teachers because you never knew when the conversation would turn on you and change into something quite else. And so there is that giddy feeling sometimes of not quite standing where you thought you were standing.

Here's a nice case, too.

The Emperor Suzong asked National Teacher Zhong, "After passing away, what will you need?"

When you die, what will you need?

The teacher said, "Oh, please make me a seamless monument."

The emperor said, "Oh please tell me the design of the monument."

So, the conversation is beginning to go in two different directions here. The teacher starts to move in.

The teacher sits there in silence and after a moment he says, "Do you understand?"

The emperor says, "I don't understand."

Yasutani Roshi used to say that there is more than one kind of not knowing. There is the not knowing that is in touch with the mystery of all things. There is the don't know which is a kind of playing for time in a dharma dialogue. Then there is just

plain ignorance. So make up your mind which this is.

And the teacher said, "I have a disciple to whom I have transmitted the teaching, named Danyuan (Tongan (sp?) Japanese): he knows about this matter."

Then later, after the National Teacher died, the emperor summoned Danyuan and asked him about the meaning of this.

Danyuan was very helpful, he said:

South of Xiang, north of Tan:

Everywhere.

Within it there is gold that fills the land

Under the shadowless tree, the community ferryboat:

What is that shadowless tree and who's on the community ferryboat? Are you on the community ferryboat?

In the crystal palace, there is no one who knows.

I'll tell you the verse here because it touches something in the koan.

Solitary and transcendent,

Round and full:

Where the power of the eye ends, it towers high.

That monument.

The moon descends, the pond is empty, the color of night is deep.

When the clouds recede, the mountain is thin, the faces of autumn are many.

The positions of the eight trigrams are right,

The eight trigrams of the I Ching.

The energies of the five elements are all in harmony.

The body is there before--have you seen it?

It has always been there.

Nanyang, father and son, (mother and child), seem to know it exists;

The buddhas and ancestors can't do a thing about it.

So when you are willing to suffer injustice; when you are willing to seek nothing; when you are willing to practice the dharma; and when you are willing to adapt to conditions, one thing just follows another naturally. The emperor asks and the teacher just naturally replies. He uses whatever comes at hand. He grabs a hammer because it is beside him and hits the emperor.

Another National Teacher, I'm not sure if it was the same one or not, called his attendant three times.

He said, "Attendant."

The attendant said, "Yes," and nothing more happened.

Then a little later he said, "Attendant."

The attendant said, "Yes," and again nothing more happened.

Then later he said, "Attendant."

The attendant said, "Yes," and again nothing happened.

Then the National Teacher said, "I thought I was ungrateful to you, but I find that you are ungrateful to me."

So this is a saying of great appreciation for his student. A student is so ungrateful no one can find him. He is hidden in the universe. That freshness each time the attendant comes out, what a great teacher he is, each time he just says, "Yes," without a cloud. He doesn't say, "You know, this is the third time you've called me. I'm a little tired of walking all the way down from the hall and saying, "Yes."

A woman once told me that this koan helped her with her children. I feel it helps me with mine. And it's kind of a moving story because she said that no matter how hard she tried she would lose her temper and hit her children. She walked in coming home from work and was really tired and a little sick and her little boy was beating on her little girl and so she told him to stop and then the little girl immediately broke something and so in a sort of crazy sequence of events the little boy starts hitting the little girl again, hitting his sister and she slapped him. Slapped him very hard and frightened herself. And she said, "What it was, was I didn't say, yes." Her practice is to answer, yes. Yes, teacher. When you suffer injustice say, oh yes. Very interesting response.

And this goes in the inner world. We often think of this in the outer world and work on resignation and patience and things like that, but that's not nearly as good as just saying, yes. And in the inner world when whatever comes up--I remember one sesshin having--wondering--just getting through it by telling myself I would wait till next period before I put my fist through the wall. And somehow I got through it. It was very helpful for me. And I didn't have to put my fist through the wall which was also helpful for me and the wall. And so to somehow just to say yes to what comes up. To say yes is not to actually enact the anger or the sorrow, necessarily, but "ah yes, now anger, now sorrow, now that feeling of complete frustration. I have been working for twenty years on my koan and still I feel like a donkey." Or just as bad, "I have passed 125 koans and still I feel like a donkey. And now I know I am a donkey." But you are truly not enough of a donkey is the problem. You're not just looking in

the well and seeing a donkey. A donkey is a very handsome thing. Purely reflected back by the well. So it is that consciousness which is when the teacher said, "Attendant," and the other teacher said, "Yes," who is the donkey and who is the well? One well looking at another well.

So that is the kind of mind that allows us to just naturally meet circumstances. When somebody slammed a door on Yun-men's (Jap. Unmon) foot and broke his leg so that he limped his whole life, at that moment he didn't get a lawyer, he got enlightened. And it was the better choice. And he got enlightened because he was already open and deeply sunk in his zazen, deeply sunk in the way of the Tao. So whatever visits you do not be too concerned whether it is hot or cold. You can appreciate it and love it for what it is--the darkness and the light. And sometimes you cannot find how to love it, then that is your koan at that moment. I cannot find anyway that it is unassailable. It's just like a cliff. But you know every cliff that you come to eventually will disappear. The cliff has been erected by your own mind. So your own mind can take it away.

So, now that we are here in sesshin let us use this wonderful time. It goes on and on and on. You are in eternal time. Please settle into it doing nothing while the grass grows and the birds sing.

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end of record