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"SEIJO AND HER SOUL SEPARATED".

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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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SEIJO AND HER SOUL SEPARATED
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The story: During the T'ang dynasty, there lived a man called Chokan. He had two daughters. When the elder girl died, he devoted himself to the younger, Seijo. As she grew up he turned his attention to the question of a suitable husband for her and eventually selected a good and strong young man. But Seijo had already taken her cousin Ochu as her lover. She had grown up with him in a union blessed since childhood, and she considered herself betrothed to him. When Chokan announced that his choice of a suitor was to arrive in the village, Seijo became cast down and sad. Ochu, unable to bear the prospect of witnessing the betrayal, left the village without saying farewell. He took his boat and rowed into the night. As he rowed he noticed the outline of a figure running along the bank. He put into the shore to see who it was; and there was Seijo, tear stained and adamant. Together they travelled to a distant land where they lived as man and wife. Five years went by. Seijo gave birth to two girls. But though she loved Ochu and the children, she was weighed down by the dishonour she'd done to her father. All this she told to Ochu. And he admitted that he too longed for his homeland. "Let us go back and beg forgiveness," he said.

And so they returned. At the port, Ochu left Seijo and the girls while he walked to the village. He went directly to Chokan's house, confessed the whole story and bowed his head at their ungrateful behaviour. Chokan received him kindly. "Which girl do you mean?" he asked. "Your daughter Seijo," Ochu replied. "That is not possible," Chokan said. "Seijo is here in the house with me. Since you left the village without bidding her farewell she has lain here; she lies here now."

Mystified, Chokan refused Ochu's invitation to go with him to the port. Instead he sent a servant to check the boat. When the servant returned, reporting that it was indeed Seijo who waited there, Chokan took Ochu

into the house. "She has not spoken since you left," he said. "It is as if she has been absent in mind, or drugged. Now I see that her soul left to follow you." So saying, he showed Ochu into Seijo's room. Hearing the story, Seijo rose from her bed, still without speaking, and walked out into the village just as Seijo and her children stepped from the cart that had brought them from the port. The silent Seijo moved forward to greet her, and as she did, the two were united.

Chokan spoke to Seijo. "Ever since Ochu left this village, you have not uttered a word, and you have always been absent in mind as if you were drugged. Now I see that your soul left your body and has been with Ochu." To this Seijo replied, "I did not know that I was sick in bed at home. When I learned that Ochu had left this village in distress, I followed his boat that night, feeling as if it were a dream. I myself am not sure which was the real me - the one with you, sick in bed, or the one with Ochu as his wife."

This story is a useful metaphor for each of our lives and also highlights a process of realisation. How I would like to approach it is to go beyond the content of the story and focus on the process. The first part of the process being separation, the illusion of duality, the second part the sense of longing, being the turning point; and the third part, reunion and transformation. Our koan study here requires us to take up the point, which is the real Seijo? It's not enough to say they were one from the beginning. We must seek the true Seijo here and now.

The first aspect that I want to address is Seijo's spirit separated. If we take this story as our own story, how often do we separate ourselves, live our lives in a fragmented way, disconnected from the environment and unresponsive to the people around us? If we start the day with a shower we are no sooner under the shower before we are thinking about what we want for breakfast. We start eating our breakfast and after the first two mouthfuls we are then off planning the day. So we tend to live in this unmindful and disconnected way. We see in this dramatised analogy that Seijo was like a ghost, living with her parents at home and not knowing she was at home. We often split off from this present moment, wanting to be somewhere else, dreaming of the ideal mate, or wanting to be something more than we are. We are ghosts to our children when we are preoccupied by our careers, mortgages, or even preoccupied saving the planet.

This is obvious when we try to engage in this simple act of sitting on our cushions, and being aware of our breath, when something from the past, some fantasy, some soap opera, will pop up and take over and suddenly we are up off our cushion and spend the next twenty minutes wandering around in our head.

If we look at our lives, how many roles do we divide ourselves into? Parent, partner, career/job, member of a sangha/community, peace activist, student - no Hollywood movie director would cast any actor in so many roles, yet we taken on these roles daily. Seijo was a wife and mother of two children in a far city. Seijo was a sick daughter at home. When we split off or divide ourselves from the present moment we drain our vital energy and are basically ineffective. In this story Seijo was completely laid low.

If our attention is not focused we are no longer congruent. We may be thinking one thing, feeling another, saying something else, and doing something entirely different. If we look into our own emotional and psychological split, what emotions do we encounter that are difficult

for us to be with? We often avoid or suppress unpleasant feelings and sensations. To be with them and include them in our zazen is our growing edge. In the very midst of our pain and difficulties lies a great freedom.

So our practice of mindfulness is to bring us home to this moment, moment after moment, to heal the splits in our psyche and to let go of that psychological conflict. The dawning of the heart and the steady light of insight will emerge by gently and faithfully returning to the practice of being with the way of things just as they are.

If we are worried about the future or preoccupied by anger or fear, although our child may be standing in front of us, the child will not really exist for us. She or he is like a ghost and we may be living like ghosts too. If I want to be with my son, I need to return to the present moment, hold him in my arms and connect with our breathing, then I naturally awaken that precious playfulness and dance of the love of life.

If we look deeper we find (as Yasutani Roshi said), "The fundamental delusion of humanity is to suppose that "I" am here and "you" are out there." This fundamental delusion of a separate permanent self is the root cause of much of our suffering. We get caught by the dualistic concepts of subject/object, self/other, oneness/emptiness, true/false, body/soul. Seijo is not simply limited to this body and soul and we are also not limited, we are this great life that is neither one nor two.

If we see from the Bodhisattva's point of view that the actuality of our daily lives and the essential world are intrinsically one and the same, one indivisible whole, then our daily actions, driving the car, feeding the kids, cleaning the house are all manifestations of the Tao. The clouds, colours, sounds, smells, feelings and thoughts are the interconnected net of Indra and the very texture and body of the Buddha.

Another major way in which we hold onto our separation is by attachment to our fixed opinions, views and beliefs. There is no mistake as to why Thich Nhat Hanh made the first precept in the "Order of Interbeing" (which means to continue to realise or to be in touch with): Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory or ideology - this includes Buddhist ones. This encourage us to experience directly for ourselves the truth. What often gets in the way is our own self-centred preoccupations. It's when we get out of our own way, let go, that the great universe opens up. If we return to the story, there is something very beautiful in this process, Seijo's longing to return home. Essentially we all have this deep longing to return to our true home, however often it is masked by the veils of our desires and ignorance. It is often pain and discontent that leads us in search of the truth, and our longing for inner peace and harmony that turns us around. Our suffering and our joy returns us to our practice over and over.

When the Buddha said the first noble truth is ~Life is suffering", what did he mean? The statement was not made from a morbid depressing view of life. Yet if we are intimate with the moment to moment impermanent nature of all things, we recognise that there is an underlying dissatisfaction. The question arises: is there something more? What emerges is the longing to understand. I know in my own life there welled up inside of me a great passion to want to know what I am, what I am. In fact, it was that passion and determination that led me to meet Aitken Roshi and it's the same passion and determination that the Buddha had when he sat down under the Bodhi tree. Our search for peace is, in

truth, the longing for the empty infinite self, the heart longing to discover its own original face. It is this very longing which is the manifestation of the Bodhisattva vow to save all beings.

So we do our zazen and we patiently refuse the domination of our fantasies, judgmental opinions about ourselves and others and we turn around as Seijo did to this moment. We turn the dharma wheel when we encounter this moment this is our focus and our samadhi will gradually deepen us, the process has its own natural momentum and unfolding .

The story has a beautiful and inspiring ending, symbolic of the process of realisation. The Seijo sick at home in bed and the Seijo with the two children from the distant city rejoined and became one. Seijo is here with us now, she is inviting us to discover our affinity with the stones and clouds, not to change from one form into another but rather to enable us to experience this ancient truth of no-self.

Another aspect that is reflected in this story, probably relevant more to women, is that we have traditionally experienced our lives and defined ourselves by who we are with. For example, Seijo was a daughter in relationship to her parents, Seijo was a wife in relationship to her husband. The person we are partner to can very often define who we think we are. We are constantly in relationship, each moment is relationship and in truth there is only one relationship. All things are no other than one's very self, so we are constantly in relationship with the self, with our infinite true self. The split Seijo became one, our maturity is not to just define ourselves by the person in our lives but to stop and be in communion with our original face without definition. The true self knows no separation.

The moon and the clouds are the same
Mountains and valleys are different.
All are blessed, all are blessed.
Is this one? Is this two?

Yes, indeed the blessed outcome. The Bodhisattva way is to nurture our longing to return home, to find our unity with all beings. The moon and the clouds are the same, essentially all beings by nature are the Buddha Tao. If we cannot see into the essential world, and only recognise our uniqueness and our differences, (mountains and valleys are different) this thinking directly leads to chaos. Such chaos is evident in our society and reflected in the way we treat our environment. Dharma/Gaia calls us to wake up the light of dawn and remember that the moon and clouds are the same, even in our darkest valleys and most difficult moments. The garden is watered, Dharma/Gaia is nurtured, all are blessed, all are blessed.

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