



Furnace Mountain

Newsletter

Winter 2008

Getting it Right

Excerpts from a Dharma Talk
by Zen Master Dae Gak
February Retreat 2008
Furnace Mountain

Hyakujo was a Zen Master and every time he gave a dharma talk an old man came into the dharma hall with the monks and when the dharma talk was finished the old man left with the monks. There are different translations of this part: one translation is that the old man came in to listen to Hyakujo's talk. Another translation is the old man came in and listened and when the dharma talk was finished, withdrew. One day he stayed behind after the monks disbursed. Hyakujo asked, "Who are you?" The old man said, "I used to be the abbot of this temple. But a student asked me, 'Is an enlightened person free from the law of cause and effect?' and I said yes. Because I said yes I was destined to be reborn a fox for five hundred years. Could you please say some turning word to free me from this fox body?"

So, is an enlightened person free from the law of cause and effect?

Hyakujo said, "Not separate from cause and effect; inseparable from cause and effect."

The old man bowed deeply and said, "If you go behind the monastery and take a stick, in a small cave beneath the rock you'll find a fox's body. Please give it a monk's funeral. That will be me." The next day Hyakujo took the assembly to the place behind the monastery and poked out a fox's body and sat with the monks and told the story.



Obaku, who was Hyakujo's student, said to Hyakujo, "How would the old man have been reborn if he had answered correctly?"

Hyakujo said, "Come here."

Obaku stepped forward and slapped Hyakujo on the face very hard.

Hyakujo clapped his hands and said, "Hooray! Hooray! I had thought that the barbarian's beard was red but I see that it was a red-bearded barbarian."

So this is a marvelous koan. It is like a river with a lot of tributaries. The first place to go in it is this old man coming with the monks, listening, and leaving with the monks. I think the translation is in error when they say he came in to listen to Hyakujo's dharma speech. He just came in and listened. He was listening. We are listening. You can pay attention. In the mind that is clear you just listen and you take it all in. You hear me and the sound of the furnace and the wind perhaps, and one does not need to choose to concentrate or focus on a particular thing. The ears

hear. One doesn't have to cut off one sense in order to process another. To be fully alive all of the senses are processed. So the old man comes in and listens. He is listening. He doesn't come in *to listen to* Hyakujo's talk. He comes in as listening itself, which is our fundamental nature.

Who is the one who is aware? This seems to be so critical to what we are doing. Who is the one who is aware right now listening to the speaker's voice? Is there identity in awareness? Or is awareness something that is who we are and that which is inseparably our mutuality. In awareness, in pure and total presence, you and I are inseparable. Awareness does not abide in this particular body, but awareness is the human movement. To settle into that there has to be a letting go of a focused concentration. Because the identity, the karmic self, concentrates, focuses, out of preference or plan. I want to get these dishes done so I have to pay attention. I want to fill out a report so I have to filter out the distracting elements in my environment. So the particular one, with her karma, has to filter out in order to accomplish some thing. Can we abide in choiceless awareness? Can we return to that as the very basis of who we are; choiceless awareness that is not selectively owned by a particular body?

There is something that begins to shift as we realize my awareness is not particular to me. My concentration, my focus, my interest, is particular to me, based on my childhood and my conditioning. But awareness itself is not particular.

(Rings bell.) There is describing the sound of the bell and there is the sound of the bell. And there is awareness which is inseparable from the sound of the bell and that is our Buddha nature, that's our original face. (Rings bell.) Awareness.

Choiceless. As you hear the sound of the bell (rings bell) before naming, before describing, you are fully aware of the sound of the bell. And you cannot be aware of the sound of the bell in the past. Nor can you be aware of the sound of the bell in the future.

It's so simple, when you get it. It just means that there is no life outside of the present moment. We live in the present moment and everything that isn't the present moment is *about* life, it's manufactured, it's theoretical or it's memory, which is partial, limited.



So Hyakujo's old man stays to listen, as listening. But one day he waited, he stayed back. For this staying back he should have had another couple of five hundred years as a fox. And he said to Hyakujo, "I was the abbot here just like you and because I answered wrongly I was destined to be reborn a fox for five hundred years. Can you help me? Can an enlightened person be free from the law of cause and effect?" Hyakujo in his answer

should also be reborn a fox for five hundred years. "Not separate from cause and effect." More explanation; more thinking.

What would be a good answer? How could you answer that? This is always our dilemma, isn't it? I want to be enlightened so that I am no longer a victim, so that I'm free from all of the doubt and pain and suffering and confusion and hurt and all of that, that we live in. How could you answer? Someone says to you, "You practice Zen. You've had some experience. Is one who gets fully awakened free from cause and effect? Do you get to play by a different set of rules?" Not possible.

Obaku, the young student, asks, "Well what if he had answered correctly, how then would he be reborn?" What if he got the right answer, how would he be reborn? That is really grabbing the flaw in the whole story. Can you answer incorrectly? What if he got it right? According to whom? Is there a large book of



photo by Phil Smith

A Poem by Ryokan

Blending with the wind, snow falls.
Blending with the snow, the wind blows.
By the hearth, I stretch out my legs.
Idling my time away, confined in this hut
Counting the days
I find that February, too, has come and gone
Like a dream.

Please consider joining us for all or part of
the February retreat

Getting it Right, con't:

right answers somewhere? What if he got it right? What is right and wrong? This is the critical part of the koan. It's so marvelous. What if he got it right?

What if you got it right? How then would your next life turn out? How would you be reborn? Would you be reborn in a higher state, with more money, or more capacity to awaken? Do you see the irony of that? If we get it right, if you sit right, if your meditation is right and your speech is right and your job is right and all of the noble eight-fold path is right, what then? How will you be reborn? In the Pure Land? With the perfect manifestation of the people you love? What's the prize? What if you get it absolutely correct? And what is the standard for correctness? It's compelling isn't it? Is this the right life that you are leading, living? Is this the right one? Or is there a better one that you should be leading, living? Whose life would you live if

you got it right? Who would you be? Would you be a better version of yourself, a happier version, a kinder version? This is so compelling. What if he had answered correctly? It sends a chill up my spine, how compelling that question is, how so much of our life is guided by that question. What if he had answered right?

Hyakujo says, "come here," which is always a trick. Why come here? I'm already here. It's a test and Obaku saw through it and he slapped him. And Hyakujo said, "Oh wonderful. Your mind and my mind, not separate." That's the meaning of I thought the barbarian's beard was red but I see it is a red-bearded barbarian: the same, equal. He is saying, your mind and my mind are the same. Yes! I see it. How wonderful! How wonderful! How wonderful!

What if he answered right? It's marvelous.

Thanks for listening.

Upcoming Retreat Schedule

- Dec. 12- 14 Introductory Retreat at Furnace Mountain, beginning 4:30pm on Friday until 1pm Sunday. Lead by Shim Sahn Osho and Kosen Osho. (\$120)
- Dec. 31st. New Year's Eve Sitting 6pm - midnight (donation requested)
- Jan. 8-9th Retreat at Furnace Mountain beginning 7:30pm Friday, meditation on Saturday until midnight, Sunday brunch served (\$120)
- February Month long Retreat. Beginning Sunday, February 1st and ending Saturday, February 28th. You may come for all or part of the month. (\$60 per day, \$420 per week, \$700 for two weeks, \$1200 for the month.)
- March 12-15. Beginning 6:00pm on Thursday, ending at noon Sunday; (\$180)



Furnace Mountain Zen Retreat Center
P.O. Box 545
Clay City, KY 40312



Renovations have continued at Furnace Mountain. The "Upper Cabin," also known as "Sam's Cabin," has recently had the addition of a bathroom (exterior visible in the photo at the left), more windows, and an electric heating system.

Your generosity allows us to continue to provide this place of beauty and peace for the practice of inquiry and cultivation of compassion. Please remember Furnace Mountain in your holiday and year-end giving. All contributions are tax deductible.