



Furnace Mountain

Newsletter

Autumn/Winter 2010

When Light No Longer Knows Darkness

Dharma Talk by Zen Master Dae Gak
November 13, 2010, Furnace Mountain

We are looking at Ummon's Two Kinds of Sicknesses,
Case 11 in the book of Serenity.

A body-less person suffers illness; a handless person compounds medicine; a mouthless person ingests it; a senseless person is well. But tell me, how do you treat a mortal disease?

Great Master Yunmen said, "When the light does not penetrate freely, there are two kinds of sickness.

"One is when all places are not clear and there is something before you.

"Having penetrated the emptiness of all things, subtly it seems like there is something – this too is the light not penetrating freely.

"Also the Dharma-body has two kinds of sickness: one is when you manage to reach the Dharma-body, but because your clinging to Dharma is not forgotten, your sense of self still remains, and you fall into the realm of the Dharma-body.

"Even if you can pass through, if you let go, that won't do. Examining carefully, (to think) 'What breath is there?' – this too is sickness."

Together we've been considering jiriki versus tariki; personal energy derived from one's own effort versus grace, energy that is received as a grace, unearned and undeserved in a measured way. Zen practice in some schools leans on the side of jiriki where one's personal effort of attaining samadhi is encouraged.

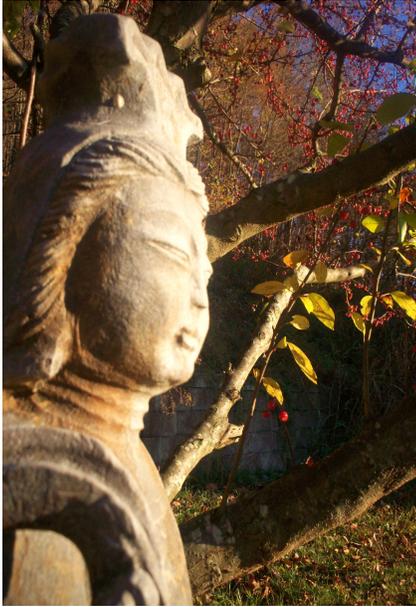
On the other end of the spectrum of energetic realization is tariki which is more consistent with the teachings of Pure Land Buddhism. The teaching is that it is by the grace of Amitabha that spiritual realization is attained. Self can never overcome itself and so awakening must be by a power or cause other than self interest. This is not meant as a moral judgment but more as a statement of the human condition as ego dominated. We are so ego



dominated we think we can do a few spiritual gymnastics or go to a workshop or two and become enlightened saints free from all suffering. So the tariki perspective is, "Not by my will but by Thy will." Anything else would be like trying to fix the self with personal effort and this is like trying to sober up by drinking more alcohol. But in both perspectives there is a split or a dualism: self emancipating itself or other emancipating self.

As we take up the koan of Ummon's Two Sicknesses, we see that jiriki from the point of view of self overcoming self is in fact sickness. When jiriki is seen as the effort that one makes toward coming to realization it becomes a sickness, an illness. We all know that process in our own practice; that kind of Zen sickness of bearing down with ego in an effort to accomplish some ideal state. Wherever there is a sense of other, whether we are speaking of some other possible idealized state, or some other out there, there is sickness. There is still a corruption, a delusion.

The inquiry of self (jiriki) versus other (tariki) is subtle and rich and it is such a treasure. I am deeply grateful to the ancestors for keeping alive this subtlety of the razor's edge practice where effort and surrender are not seen as opposites or exclusive. It is neither by my will nor by other but that the activity of practice itself with persistence, humility and patience bears its own fruit. Its not that my



effort versus other effort gets solved but that in fact it is neither by my effort nor by the grace of something other that awakening occurs. It is by awakening itself that awakening occurs. There is that kind of subtlety and that kind of faith in practice, not faith in something else out there in the universe, but faith that the very

activity of practice itself is awakening; that just sitting is enlightenment. Practice and enlightenment are not separate.

I am not saying that jiriki is one sickness and tariki is the other but rather that awakening is seeing that jiriki and tariki are indistinguishably the same. There is no personal effort that will pull us out of the swamp of our own self interest and there is no other who can save us and bring us to a far off land free from pain and anguish. It is our practice to see that they are both the same and that they exist simultaneously and what defines them is not their discreet differences or characteristics but rather the partial angle of vision we have. It seems then that to bring one up without the other is to lose the whole and that to talk about a facet without complete and total acknowledgment of the entire jewel of awareness is to create a division. This division is the fundamental delusion (sickness) that is the basis of all suffering. It is like saying the tree is green and believing that green is even close to what the tree is. The tree is none other than the grace of all being that blossoms in full awareness of neither tree nor me.

In practice, we begin to look with sincere inquiring hearts, which we have, which we are, which is our birthright. And we stay within the paradox with poise and grace, upright, not turning away. Our practice then becomes a willingness to stay in the very midst of all of it; neither preferring the sacred nor the profane, neither attaching to the bright, luminous, transcendent mind that comes, nor finding aversion in the dark, heartbreaking, painful world of samsara. But we sit in the midst of it and realize that it comes and it goes and it rises and it falls and it pretty much has absolutely nothing to do with our own personal agenda or belief system or the number of times or earnestness with which we summon Amida Buddha. And it pretty much has

nothing to do with the effort we make to overcome it. In this tariki and jiriki are reconciled. Not two.

In my experience I don't get to choose calm over paranoia. There are some things I can do to try to adjust mind like trying to get a good night's sleep or not drinking too much caffeine or alcohol, being somewhat careful about gossip, and those are cause and effect kinds of things. I know that when I am very tired and I don't get enough sleep and I'm very busy and I'm doing a lot of retreats and working a lot, there is a kind of flatness which is, I think, catecholamine depletion, a biochemical state of disinterest or hopelessness. But in spite of that kind of general taking care of one's physical body, I have yet to find a way to manage the rising and falling of mood, the rising and falling of disappointment, the rising and falling of fear, the rising and falling of despair, hurt feelings, and all of those things that are human. So, our practice then becomes to sit upright in the midst of it, in the very midst of it. Not because it's the best thing to do, not because it's the noble thing to do, not because it's the courageous thing to do but because it's the only thing to do. To flop around wildly with complaint and desperation as a strategy for overcoming whatever it is we seek to overcome doesn't seem to work very well. What we are left with then is to be in stillness, to be together, to be in mutuality and to do it anyway, not to overcome something but to do our practice anyway.

Then, at some point, as we mature in practice, there is the realization, the awakening, that this is all there is; it is sitting together, it is eating together, it is singing together. And all of the stuff that is going on in the mind about all of this, and about my life and about my situation and about my condition and about my opinions is like legs on a snake, simply clouds coming through a vast empty sky of choiceless awareness. There isn't even a place, "a one" who has a position in that awareness but it is awareness itself. We pass through the world as if our conclusions and our opinions and our cognitive ordering is reality when in fact cognitive ordering is just a process in and of itself.

Someone asked recently about appreciation and we talked about appreciation as a dualistic concept; that I am here and I appreciate the floor or I appreciate the temple and there is self and other. But as we enter into appreciation, as one begins to genuinely inquire into what appreciation is, which is an awareness of actuality, there is a fundamental shift from the position that there is a self that goes out, to the realization

that the ten thousand things are in fact the realization of self coming forward as self. We talk about co-dependant arising, but if we genuinely look carefully at this sense of co-dependant arising, what is it that we as one of the “co” in the dependent arising bring to it, substantially? Is it my memory, my thoughts, my DNA, my blood circulating through the body, my organs, my opinions? What is it that I, whoever I think I am, bring into the encounter that causes co-dependant arising? I think if we look particularly carefully we see that there is nothing that we bring. What we call co-dependant arising is only appreciation. It is only appreciation that this particular moment arises, this particular moment exists, this particular moment which is who we are, from a cause-effect perspective is no other than beyond measure the myriad things coming forward. The blossoming of the Buddha-mind itself would be the religious poetry of it. It is the very unfolding of all of creation itself, not two things coming together to create a third, not me in appreciation for the gifts given of the trees and the blue sky and the warm day and the friends who are listening and the floor and the temple, but that the very fact of the ten thousand things calls forth realization which is appreciation. What I call me in this moment is in fact all of being itself and not separate from that. Because this realization is so clear and freeing from fear we call it appreciation. And I think this is the only alive definition of appreciation that perseveres.

The mind, the heart, has the capacity to step into that realization and disappear completely. It is as simple as looking around and seeing. It is as simple as perking the ears and hearing. It is as simple as tasting what is put in the mouth, or touching what one comes in contact with, smelling the rise of incense or the putrid smell of sewage, or the marvel of how disease is only a point of view.

Then our practice, to return to the koan of two sicknesses, is not shikantaza in the sense of I am just sitting but that I *am* shikantaza. Coming back into the practice, we are everything we do, each step we take, each breath we take, each moment of listening we have, each willingness we have to come forward as ourselves, is jiriki, is awakening, is enlightenment. I come forward as myself, there is no awakening beyond that. That coming forward in no way can be evaluated because we are always coming forward, because we are always opening, because we are always moving into being and being and being and that being itself is unfolding.

If you look at the floor for a moment, the history of the floor is that it is a cherry tree that grew in Kentucky and



our education tells us that it required a certain nutrition and a certain watering and a certain sunlight and a certain person’s effort to cut and plane it, and a certain hardiness to resist disease and pestilence and those are all educational, thinking through and knowing and having some sense of what it took to bring the floor here for us to sit on. It is certainly helpful and a kind of appreciation that benefits all beings to see things with this mind. But if you look carefully at the floor, and you genuinely look at the floor, not analyzing it, maybe not even knowing that it is cherry tree, but if you genuinely look at it then what the eyes see and what the body experiences is boundless, is all of the universe in its pattern and color and texture. It is not something to be cultivated; I want to cultivate the ability to see the universe in the very actuality of the floor. It is to look and look and look and to look without meaning, and it is there.

Just as it is there when you look into your friend’s eyes in a conversation or you hear your friend’s voice and there is a resonance or you feel your friend’s touch and your friend’s hand in yours, or you feel the movement of the car going forward while you’re riding in it. That is the entirety of the universe unfolding as that very moment itself. That there is no past and no future but we are enacting the entirety of it all in every moment. Then there is not gratitude *for* but gratitude *as*.

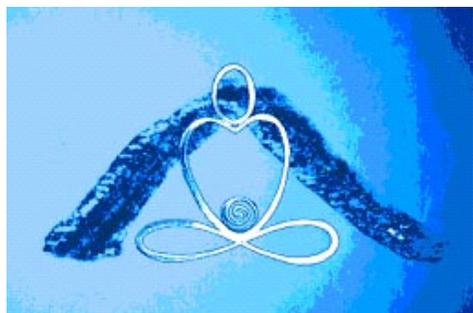
So we return to the simplicity of our life, eating food, drinking water, offering our friend food. Just this! This is our whole life.

Thanks for listening.

Upcoming Retreat Schedule

- January 29 - February 26** **Month-long retreat at Furnace Mountain** led by Zen Master Dae Gak. Beginning Saturday, January 29th at 6:00 pm and ending Saturday, February 26th at 12:00 noon. Cost \$1400 month, two weeks \$800; one week \$490
- March 5** **Introduction to Zen**, One day retreat; 10 a.m. -5 p.m. Cost. \$40.
- March 10-13** **Weekend Retreat** at Furnace Mountain led by Zen Master Dae Gak. Beginning Thursday evening at 6:00 p.m. and ending Sunday at 1:00 p.m. Cost \$210
- April 7- 10** **Weekend Retreat** at Furnace Mountain led by Zen Master Dae Gak. Beginning Thursday evening at 6:00 p.m. and ending Sunday at 1:00 p.m. Cost \$210
- April 15 -17** **Zen and Nonviolent Communication workshop**. See details below.
- May 7- 14** **Weeklong Retreat** at Furnace Mountain led by Zen Master Dae Gak. Beginning Saturday, May 7th at 6:00 pm and ending Saturday, May 14th at 12:00 noon. Cost \$490
- June 10-12** **Weekend Introduction to Zen Retreat** at Furnace Mountain. Beginning Friday evening at 4:30 p.m. and ending Sunday at 1:00 p.m. Cost \$140
- July 9- 16** **Weeklong Retreat** at Furnace Mountain led by Zen Master Dae Gak. Beginning Saturday, July 9th at 6:00 pm and ending Saturday, July 16th at 12:00 noon. Cost \$490

To register for retreats, send an email to furnacemt@aol.com or visit our website: www.furnacemountain.org



Zen & Nonviolent Communication

A weekend retreat
exploring meditation, empathy
& compassionate communication

April 15 – 17, 2011

**Furnace Mountain
Zen Retreat Center**

In this workshop we will combine Zen practice with the practice of Nonviolent Communication (NVC).

Everyone is welcome at this training, from beginners to people with prior experience with NVC or Zen. Together we will explore how the wisdom of Buddhist consciousness and the tools of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) can work together to transform suffering into peace of mind and how they can help raise compassionate awareness in everyday life. The workshop will provide both Zen-practice and NVC exercises.

Together we will explore ways to transform inner and outer dialogue from argument, judgment, blame and analysis into an expression of ourselves that supports growth, builds trust, transforms conflict and supports authentic, compassionate relationship. We will experiment with an approach to communication that is based on caring for and finding compassion for each other's as well as our own basic human needs.

NVC is both a concrete set of skills and a spiritual practice that leads to inner and outer harmony. The simple 4-step process supports emotional freedom, self-acceptance, inner peace, and fulfilling relationships. NVC was created by clinical psychologist and international peacemaker Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, with the global Center for Nonviolent Communication.

The workshop will be facilitated by Martha Laskey, Certified NVC trainer; Zen Master Dae Gak, and Daniela Myozen Herzog, Zen Teacher.

The retreat fee of \$ 375.00 includes room and board. Partial scholarships are available by application. Please apply early. For further information or to register, contact Daniela Herzog: myozen@web.de or visit the website: www.furnacemountain.org.