

68-04-23.B [68-04-23-B]

April, 1968 Shosan Ceremony (Question & Answer)
Z.M.C.

(Transcription checked, edited by Brian F.)

"A monk asked Hyakujo, 'Has some special thing happened in this temple?' Hyakujo said, 'I have been sitting on this mountain,' and the monk respectfully bowed to him. Hyakujo then gave him a big slap."

This morning I talked about Nansen's everyday mind is Tao, and this evening I am talking about something special. If you understand what is something special and what is something common, please come and discuss this point with me.

S: "*Kyu chu isan saki*" [_____ in _____?]: *What is the meaning of this in everyday life?*

R: *Ku chu itan saki?* [emptiness in _____?] Something special or something common--if you are hung up those ideas, those are nothing but a stone hand up in the air. Do you understand it? What is practice without being hung up on anything?

S: *Thank you very much.*

R: Being without an answer is the best answer.

S: *Docho Roshi, although you can only clarify an outline, and we can only hear what we realize, please say something about echos.*

R: *Eko?* The sutra we recite after zazen?

S: *No, the phenomenon of an echo.*

R: Everything is an echo of your mind, of your activity.

S: *Thank you very much.*

S: *Docho Roshi, how can being in sesshin be practicing the middle way?*

R: When you forget all about the middle way, there you have the middle way.

S: *Docho Roshi, you are you, and I am me, and you are not you, and I am not me, and the river keeps moving by. Where is the medicine for this sorrow?*

R: The river going and the evanescence of life or ungraspable things is itself medicine. Sometimes it looks like poison, but actually, those things are the only medicine we should take.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, why does man's work bring so little merit?*

R: There may be no merit, but when you realize that there is no merit, that is great merit. All the merit accumulated by all the people is your merit. So that is why the merit is not, and, at the same time, is your merit. When you forget all about "you" or "others", the merit will be great.

S: *Thank you.*

S: Docho Roshi, If the President of the United States were to come to Tassajara and say the earth and the sun were on a collision course and ask us what we could do, some of us might say that we could not change what has already collided in this man's imagination. Actually, the least we could do would be to tell him, "No moon, no sun," and show him your wonderful garden.

R: Yeah. No moon or no sun, but the sun is the sun, the moon is the moon. So when moon is really moon, there will not be any collision. There is no need for the moon to be a sun or vice versa.

S: *Thank you.*

S: The wheel of dharma turns in our life in many ways. We go from sickness to health to sickness again, and back to health. Should we try to master this dharma? What is its nature?

R: When the wheel of dharma is turning, that is mastering it. Because it is always turning, it is difficult to tell how it turns in detail. Only when we allow it to turn, or we can keep up with the turning wheel, can we actually master it. But, in reality, we are turning with it, we are actually a part of the wheel. In this way we should master the wheel without trying to master it.

S: *Thank you.*

S: Docho Roshi, if desires are inexhaustible, how may we put an end to them?

R: To put an end to something does not mean to annihilate it. When you do not try to put an end to it is actually when you put an end to it. Then evil desire is not evil any more. When you think of something or treat something as an evil or wrong way, or if you try to stop it, it changes into evil and becomes a disturbance in our practice.

S: Is this how we can vow to put an end to desires without expressing another desire?

R: Actually, we should know the nature of the desire before we try to stop it or control it. To know what evil nature is, is to stop evil desire. When you have no idea of evil, evil desire is not evil desire any more. That is how you stop it.

S: *Thank you.*

S: Docho Roshi, from my practice, I believe that the hardest and deepest teaching of Buddhism for all men is to not be attached to anything. Can you explain why this is so?

R: We say you should not to attach to anything. The reason you ask this question is that you think, "Is it impossible to not attach to anything?" So it means that in your mind you have the idea of attachment and detachment. But true nonattachment means to get free from the idea of attachment or detachment, knowing that attachment and detachment are two sides of one reality.

S: *Thank you.*

S: Docho Roshi, how are we to know how to behave when a strong dualistic situation arises in our life, and it seems as though we can take only one of two paths...?

R: Don't hate making just one choice. Don't think which is good or bad. When you do not think about it, you will intuitively know which way to go and which is better.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, what shall I do about the fear that causes small mind or limited mind?*

R: Fear looks like something which will cover your entire being. But if you wait, if you watch the fear, watch yourself, it will not be fear any more. Whatever it is, it is necessary to stop using it as your model. It is necessary to drive you, fear. [drive your fear?]

S: *Thank you.*

R: Attack your enemy by attacking his horse. Do you understand?

S: *Docho Roshi, love is love and hate is hate, and love is empty and hate is empty.*

R: There you will have a great sorrow or longing, the loneliness of emptiness. Until you get accustomed to this experience, you cannot get out of the trouble or fear or whatever it is. When you can remain stable with some composure in pitch dark, you will have deep true composure.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, big mind and small mind are equally without size; the Buddhist practice is no practice. Is there any practice which is not Buddhist practice?*

R: When you are involved in dualistic ideas in your practice, that is wrong Buddhist practice. There is no alternative way for us. This means to sit alone on the top of the mountain. Whatever happens is the mountain. That is part of your practice. To sit on the mountain means to be a part of the mountain. That is our practice. To try to climb up to the top of the mountain is not our practice. So you can say that various practices are nothing but Buddhist practice because we are all of the mountain. For the people who are trying to climb up to the top of the mountain, there may be various ways to the top. But we must not forget that we are the center of the universe and are sitting in the center of the universe, or at the top of the mountain.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, you have taught us that everything changes and that we can rely on nothing. From one day to the next, then, we cannot be sure of a place to practice or a teacher. If this is so, how can we continue our practice forever?*

R: Wherever you go, you will find your teacher, as long as you have the eyes you have right now, as long as you have ears to listen. So Dogen Zenji said the color of the mountain and the sound of the river are Shakyamuni Buddha's voice. But you should be grateful for your teacher, because he opened up your eyes and ears to see and to listen. Then your teacher is always with you, and you can continue your practice forever.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, how can I behave with my usual mind when my house is on fire?*

R: Your house is on fire? (laughs) Why don't you get out of it?

S: *How?*

R: Give up your house. You will find a good new house.

S: *Thank you.*

S: Docho Roshi, one step forward, one step back--how can I go where I don't want to go?

R: When you don't want to go, there is no other way but to stop there. And while you are stopping, you should make your seat warm. To stay, that is the way.

S: *Thank you.*

S: Docho Roshi, I serve you some ferns in your third bowl. Has anything special been given or anything particular been received? Is it possible to give and take?

R: I couldn't follow you.

S: If I serve you something in your third bowl, do you receive anything special? Do I give anything special, or do I give something common? Is it possible for people to help each other, really?

R: I couldn't follow the first sentence you said.

S: If I serve you something at mealtime in the third bowl, what has transpired between us then?

R: I feel as if your entire being were served to me. That is not food any more.

S: Docho Roshi, this mind has no real questions. Why is this?

R: You are practicing our way without any questions. That is true practice. Don't worry about having no questions.

S: *Thank you.*

S: Docho Roshi, is enlightenment always changing?

R: It is. It will change always, but if you are enlightened, you will not be bothered by its change.

S: Docho Roshi, at the end of your lectures you always ask us if we understand. What does "understand" mean?

R: Actually, what I mean is did you accept it? That's a good question.

S: *Thank you.*

S: Docho Roshi, question beyond word, word beyond question.

R: When you make improvement, you have questions. So when you are improving yourself constantly, that question is more than a question. That is a question beyond words. Words beyond question means that, even though you are making questions, you know there is no other way to improve yourself, but you need some help or encouragement, so we discuss something between us. Actually, the only way is to improve ourselves by ourselves. When you understand this point, your question is something more than words, and your words are something more than the question you have. In this way, you should find yourself. That is the way. Expressing how you feel by words and trying to know what you feel, over and over you find yourself like this. Then, to continue this kind of practice is our way.

S: *Thank you.*

S: Docho Roshi, I am drowning in the great ocean. Will I wake up and discover this is a

dream?

R: How did you feel?

S: *I can't describe it.*

R: Which do you prefer, to be drowning in the ocean or safe on the land? Which do you like?

S: *(sighs) I don't know.*

R: That is right. It is very difficult to decide. If so, we should prefer to stay in the bottomless ocean with some difficulty, because we have more possibilities. If you are on the land in this way, there is not much hope. To have a chance to struggle is very good. You feel much better. Even if you have fear, soon you will manage it.

S: *Docho Roshi, there is nothing to attain, and yet every morning we chant and vow to attain it. And enlightenment is within me, and yet I can't tap its resources, I can't make any use of it. When you speak, I think I understand, and I accept what you say, but when you are through speaking, I reject everything you say. I don't understand how, unless somehow I can experience the truth myself, I'll know what to believe and what not to believe, what to accept and what not to accept.*

R: Don't try to accept things. But you should, you know. Don't think I am talking to you. I am discussing something, that's all. Because you think I am talking about something to you, you cannot accept it. So what I am saying is how you feel. The way I think is the way I am talking, actually. Your weak point is that you are trying to understand it. In short, you are like that big baby, you know, and that is your weak point. You should walk using your own feet.

S: *Then what is your role as my teacher?*

R: "My teacher", you say, but actually I am your pain. I cannot do anything with you. Tentatively, I will treat you in this way.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, hearing the stream, feelin it within, tears flow. What is the meaning of this?*

R: It is because this kind of feeling of practice is quite new to you. More and more you will feel deep joy in your practice. It does not mean your practice is wrong or your attainment is not good. But if the way you feel it is with tears, that is because your experience is quite unfamiliar to you, that's all. So you will get more accustomed to this fact.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, I have no question.*

R: No question? I hope you can continue your practice in that way. When you have a problem, you should think more. But right now you are going on a big freeway. Very good.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, although you are our teacher, I feel that you have nothing to teach. But you stay in this world and suffer along with us, and I'd like to ask you why, except that's a very foolish question. I think you just sit and wait for us here at Tassajara, and I'd like*

to thank you.

R: I don't want to be your teacher in the usual sense, because with your idea of a teacher, you cannot find your teacher in its true sense. That is why I always say I am not your teacher. But we are actually practicing with you. That is my responsibility.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, if you, and me, and everyone here, and everything around us is emptiness, can we see form in its change?*

R: Because we are changing, we say "empty". Nothing stays in its own home, because everything is changing. But usually when I say "you" or "I", we already have some idea which does not change. That kind of idea is empty. But if we understand everything in the state of change, that is true understanding.

S: *The change can't be form?*

R: Moment after moment it changes. For a while, you can see some form, you can observe things in their particular forms. That is form. But it exists in the smallest particle of time. In the next particle of time it will be some other thing. But on each moment, it exists--that is also true. So form is emptiness, emptiness is form.

S: *Docho Roshi, I have no question.*

R: Bow, and rest.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, how is it that Big Mind can hide so well?*

R: Because it is too big, or because you are too near-sighted.

S: *Roshi, when you eat an apple, form is emptiness. Give an example of emptiness is form.*

R: When you say emptiness, you have the idea of complete...that is not what emptiness means...everything is....

*****[TAPE WAS TURNED HERE, SOME LOST]*****

R: Emptiness is form, form is emptiness.

S: *In its own home?*

R: Mm-hmm. Bamboo is bamboo, but it does not always exist as a bamboo shoot. It is growing. We say "emptiness", but some concrete idea of a bamboo shoot is empty.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, your words without tongue, may we hear without ears?*

R: Yes, you should hear without ears. It means you shouldn't stick to my words. You should accept them with your whole body and your whole practice. You should hear what I say as you hear a bird singing in your zazen. Then you are not hearing my words just with your ears, but with your practice. Nothing happens, you know. Even though you hear something, that is a part of practice. So nothing happens besides your practice, and that is how you hear my talk without ears.

S: *Thank you.*

S: Docho Roshi, the bodhisattva's vow, how to understand it, and to follow it?

R: The Bodhisattva's vow is to vow that which is not possible. It looks that way. But possible or not is not our point. We should continue our practice without being involved in its possibility or impossibility, because we should do it--we should continue our way, that's all. That is the bodhisattva's way. In other words, our practice is based on our inmost nature. As we are human beings, and sentient beings, and sons or daughters of Buddha, we should continue. That is the bodhisattva's vow.

S: Thank you.

S: Docho Roshi, if you have a finger, you can point. If you have a voice, you can GROWL.

R: Yeah, but until I feel I have a voice or finger, I cannot use it. Do you understand? When I want it, I may use it, but when I don't have it, I cannot use it.

S: Thank you.

S: Docho Roshi, how is a person with no self-perception aware of himself as being a person with no self-perception?

R: No self-perception means no idea of self.

S: And who's aware of being a person with no self-perception?

R: Oh. Here again, "no" is not just a negation. It is a strong affirmation. Usually "no" is the opposite of "yes", of affirmation. But in this case, "no" means here [knocks on something] and this [knocks again] is "no". When you are making "this" be yes or no [knocks], someone who knows what it actually is will say, "No!" [knocks] This is this kind of "no". Both [yes and no] are not true--this is it [knocks].

S: Thank you.

S: Docho Roshi, the top of the mountain is a place without competition. Why is there so much competition to get there?

R: Because you forget your seat and try to discover your seat, there is so much competition. Each one sits on the top of his own mountain. Each one of us is boss. There is no competition.

S: Thank you.

S: Docho Roshi, what can you say to my doubt about whether my zazen is true zazen, my practice is true practice, and my effort is right effort-- that type of thing?

R: Don't doubt our practice. Just sit without doubting true practice. And when we get up, you should get up and join our practice. That is good enough. Don't think more than that. Then your practice will be true practice. But if you think too much, or taste it too many times--to salty, too much water, not enough salt, water, salt--you will ruin the whole thing. That is what you are doing, okay? So don't think too much and don't try too hard. Take your time, and steady yourself. Okay?

S: Thank you.

S: Docho Roshi, why are we you?

R: Why are you me?

S: *Why are we you?*

R: Oh. There is no reason. If you want to find out why, you should ask yourself, you know.

S: *I am.*

R: Huh?

S: *I am.*

R: Okay, you are. So when you are truly me, there is no problem. But when you say "why", there may be something to think about. But for me, there is nothing to think about between you and me.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *When we aren't happy, we suffer. Will we suffer when we are happy?*

R: Suffering exists, actually, in your happiness. And so, if you seek for happiness, what you will get will be suffering, not happiness. So when you suffer, you should find true happiness in your suffering. That is how you seek for true happiness. If you want to find what real suffering is, you should seek for happiness. You will find out what suffering is in its true sense.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, the dharma is no dharma, the tathagata doesn't come or go, and the Buddha cannot be seen by the thirty-two marks. Where is our way?*

R: Actually, there is no way, no way whatever. We say you will see various mountains across the river, near mountains and remote mountains, range after range. Between the waves, we think there is no road in the sea, but between the roads [waves?] there is some road. Nothing exists in its sheer emptiness. Even on the water there are mountains. Even in the water there are paths to follow. So as long as we are practicing our way, there is no problem. Before you practice it, you have problems.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, I feel pretty foolish. How do you feel?*

R: Pretty foolish? Yeah, I feel the same way.

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, first our teacher became ill, and then someone passed away. What is the meaning of this?*

R: I didn't think about the meaning of that, but nothing happens just by accident. There must be deep meaning to it. But I don't think you will have my funeral service very soon. I don't think in that way, but there are many things to think about.

S: *Docho Roshi, melting into rivers of gold, tasting the bitterest dregs at the bottom of the teacup, I feel I am a more complete person for having these experiences, because I find a world that is not measured. However, I don't want to become attached to this world, but want to give it its proper place so it will have its own existence. How can we see this?*

R: You understand very well, but still your understanding is not real because the idea of ego is involved. So don't think so much. Instead of thinking, you should try to

forget yourself by all means. Okay?

S: *Thank you.*

S: *Docho Roshi, to many of the questions, you have answered, "Don't do anything," or, "Forget about it." I have difficulty with this point. I feel that's maybe too selfish. It helps us, and it helps the people who practice with us, but I'm not sure it helps others so much. I feel we have to go beyond accepting everything. Sometimes Zen practice seems too much like the poem of the bamboo whose shadows don't disturb the dust on the stairs. I think the dust on the stairs has to be disturbed sometimes, and grass doesn't always grow by itself. What do you think?*

R: We should take care of the grass, and we should always be disturbed by, or at least, if possible, appreciate the shadow of a bamboo. If we ignore this point, our practice doesn't mean anything. Paying great consideration to everything, while having renunciation in it, is our way, which is pretty difficult. This is the point many of our Zen masters had difficulty with in their true practice, because it is not a matter of successful or unsuccessful. It is a matter of how to handle oneself or how to understand the way to work on it. This is a very subtle point.

No one else but you can help you. As your teacher, I am trying to help you in various ways, but at the same time, I know I cannot help you. But as disciple and teacher, we should always continue this kind of effort. That is why I am trying pretty hard with other students. I appreciate your effort and way of working on your own problem, too. This is very true with everybody, but we should make more effort to know how to work on ourselves, how to help ourselves, how to take care of our practice. This is the most important point. So let's make more effort on this point. Each one of you is making a pretty good effort on this point, but not enough in comparison to our teachers and masters who attained perfect enlightenment. Thank you very much.

S: *Thank you.*

R: The points all of you presented were like jewels and gold, but we should make jewels and gold in their true sense. When we say something special, that may be jewels and gold. When we say something common, that is also jewels and gold to which ordinary people attach. When we attach to them, they are not true jewels and gold. What we are practicing here is not compared with anything else. No one can practice our way as we are doing at Tassajara. We have our own way, and Tassajara has its own way. If you start to compare gold with iron, jewels with charcoal, you will not understand what jewels and gold are. Something common is valuable because it is common. Something special is valuable because it is special. People may say that to sit on top of the mountain is something special, and what we do in our everyday life is something which is common. But in its true sense, or in its absolute sense, there is no difference.

So I should like to be a good friend and a good teacher of each one of you.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 68-04-23-B

