



The Oak Tree in the Garden

Journal of the Hidden Valley Zen Center

Hidden Valley Zen Center Teisho

Today is Sunday March 9th 2014, and I'd like to share with you first, something out of a book called, "The Enlightened Mind," which is an anthology of sacred writing put together by Stephen Mitchell quite a long time ago. This particular quote is from Huang Po, or Obaku, as his name is pronounced in Japanese, a Chinese Zen master. Here is what he said, "*This pure mind, which is the source of all things, shines forever with a radiance of its own perfection.*"

"This pure mind, which is the source of all things, shines forever with a radiance of its own perfection"

—and that is you!

"But most people are not aware of it and think that the mind is just the faculty that sees, hears, feels and knows. Blinded by their own sight, hearing, feeling and knowing they don't perceive the radiance of the source. If they could eliminate all conceptual thinking, this source would appear, like the sun rising through the empty sky and illuminating the whole universe. Therefore, you students of the Tao, who seek to understand through seeing, hearing, feeling and knowing, when your perceptions are cut off your way to mind will be cut off and you will find nowhere to enter. Just realize that although mind is manifested in these perceptions, it is neither part of them nor separate from them. You shouldn't try to analyze these perceptions or think about them at all, but you shouldn't seek the one mind apart from them. Don't

hold onto them or leave them behind or dwell on them or reject them. Above, below, and around you, all things spontaneously exist because there is nowhere outside the Buddha mind."

When we're born, we come into this world already complete. As time passes, of course, we develop, of course we grow. Physical growth continues our entire life and hopefully the growth of awareness and the expansion of mind and let go-ness also continues the rest of our life. But we're already perfect from the beginning. We're already possessed of this one Mind that Huang Po was speaking of. And it is through our practice that we seek to return to an openness, a comprehension, a living from without hindrance, of that true Mind.

Many of you know the story of Shido Munan, a middle aged monk in 17th century Japan who was accused of fathering a child. He was not the father, but nonetheless he was wrongly accused of being so. Because the young girl who was the mother of the baby insisted that he was the father, there was of course no questioning it. When the baby was born, the grandparents, deeply embarrassed and most likely angry, marched it over to Shido Munan and presented it to him to raise. The interesting thing about this situation is that despite the fact that it was not his child, that he was wrongly accused, that it was going to make life quite difficult for him in many ways, he simply replied with words that are very difficult to translate into English. The closest approximation might be, "Oh, I see...it must seem like this." He received the child without objection, without anger, without a barrage of self-defense, and raised it for a year until the mother confessed who the father really was.

Now the grandparents are once again deeply embarrassed, having wrongly besmirched the name of the good priest, and they came back to return the child to its mother. Heads bowed, deep apologies, they ask for the child. And Shido Munan, again, only replies, "Oh, I see..." No need in either encounter to defend himself, to be angry, to be upset, to hurl recriminations. Just simple, 100% acceptance that this was what his karma had brought him and there was no point in objecting—and who was there to object? Both when he was first presented with the child and again when the grandparents took the baby back he saw no reason to say anything in defense of a "self" he knew deeply to be a mirage. No, "How could you think I'd do such a thing? I'm a celibate monk!" And then later, no "I should have told you so." "You should have realized that I wouldn't have done such a thing." Nothing. He was living the tremendous freedom and ease in life that comes from having experiencing deeply that true Mind. In doing so and having seen through enough of his attachments and conditioning, he could truly be free to respond in each of those moments without rancor.

How many of us are able to do that in our own lives?

The good news is, we can sit in the zendo and do this incredible practice that will take us there if we give ourselves to it. While Zen practice is not easy, it is something that will bring us greater freedom than anything else can bring us in our entire life. It is something that will bring us greater ease, greater joy, than anything else can bring us in our life. And that ease and that joy are lasting if we persist in the practice.

When we first begin to practice, it's pretty interesting. We're engaged in it because it's new, we are curious, and we are excited to be learning how to work with the body and how to focus the mind; there's often as well, a subtle ego-enhancement: "I'm doing Zen!"

And then the honeymoon period ends...and some amount of shit usually begins to hit the fan. Or our intellect begins to exert a strong,

misguided influence and we question every aspect of practice. We may run into disappointments or get discouraged when the breath doesn't come out as far as we think it should; we get bored, we get frustrated, we may start projecting on the teacher or our fellow practitioners; we begin to think Zen is not what it's cooked up to be and it's certainly not for us. Many people quit, unfortunately, at that point. It's unfortunate because that's exactly where you can start doing some deeper, very significant, work.

Zen practice is not, as the Beat poets thought in the 1950's, about doing anything you feel like and not having to deal with consequences of that behavior. That's not what authentic Zen practice about. It's about being truly one with our life, about being deeply responsible, and about opening to our innate compassion and wisdom and allowing that to function more and more completely. As we do the practice we begin to discover, as someone perceptively said after a sesshin in which they had had a kensho, "This practice is truly bodhisattvic. First, it shows us where we are caught—and then it sets us free."

Wouldn't it be nice if we could just simply be set free from the moment we sit our rear down on the zafu? But that's not the way it happens. First we have to see where we are caught before we can be set free. Until then we go along blindly, driven by our habit patterns, driven by our conditioning, driven by a sense of a self that we feel we need to defend, that we need to protect at great cost. Caught in such an illusion, we don't even know truly how we are living our life. We're often not aware, for example, of a tone of voice we use in reaction to something says. We're not aware of how much we argue, as another example. We're not aware of how we defend, and defend, and defend. And what are we defending? There's nothing really to defend! As Shido Munan had realized, there's truly no one to defend.

Torei Enji, in his wonderful exposition of practice—*Treatise on the Inexhaustible Lamp*—called this vital period of inner work, "the Long

Maturation.” Shunryu Suzuki Roshi also spoke of this period in which we become more aware of when and where we’re behaving unskillfully, of when and where we’re giving in to anger or irritation or doing a knee jerk reaction to get something without even considering the full picture. Suzuki Roshi called these moments of wincing as we see our behavior with greater clarity, “mind weeds,” and he said they make wonderful manure. If you are old enough, you can remember when farms were fertilized with cow poop, and in Spring, driving through Ohio, for example, the air reeked of manure. But that manure fed that soil, enriched it and made it bear fruit more readily than it could have otherwise—and it’s the same with that “mind weeds” manure of our mind.

Every time we see where we are caught, we see where, “Oh, shit, why did I do that? Why did I answer that way? Why didn’t I respond rather than react to what just happened?” it gives us the opportunity to let it go that dysfunctional behavior. How do we let it go? By owning it. By feeling completely the embarrassment, the discomfort of having done something unskillful or inappropriate, of having reacted to a situation, perhaps in anger, certainly in self-defense. But now we can see it! We can tune in, feel it, own it, allow ourselves to experience the physical sensations in our body! This is a tremendously effective way to work with it.

It’s vital not to get into the story behind it because stories are only stories. Thoughts create stories and that doesn’t free us. It’s the experiential angst of having done something we’re not proud of, that we regret, that will then give us a heads up the next time we would otherwise automatically repeat. Having worked with these “caught places,” the next time they start to raise their heads and we are able to see ourselves about to react, we instead feel, “Wait, a minute, I don’t want to go there. I’m not going to do that again.” And we don’t.

It takes awareness. It takes a willingness to walk in to the embarrassment of catching yourself doing something you’re not proud of. It takes a willingness to see clearly what’s going

on in our own minds. And the practice is critical; it’s an absolutely essential participant in this process.

Zen practice is essentially two-fold. It’s about coming to awakening, seeing deeply and clearly the true nature of reality. And then continuing our practice to see it even more clearly, and even more deeply. And continuing beyond that to see even more clearly and more widely and more deeply. And continuing on beyond that. Accompanying that, we work on what both Torei Enji and his father in Zen, Master Hakuin, wrote—that what is essential in practice is putting it into action, living it—working on that long maturation. We don’t have to have had kensho before we can begin the work on the long maturation. It can start at any moment. However, zazen is the vital underpinning to it because without zazen, we’re just hanging out in our heads and not reaching where transformation can happen, which is deep within the mind, beyond words.

As we go along in our daily life, becoming as aware as possible is important, and zazen helps with that. It’s important to pay attention where, for example, we may not be as aware as we could be. We may be washing the dishes and somebody else comes along and says, “Hey, look at this frying pan, there is still stuff on it even though it’s sitting there in the drying rack!” Not to multi-task when we do things—and when we’re washing the dishes with our hands and re-living a past moment or anticipating a future one, that’s multi-tasking as much as trying to check your email while you’re on the phone is. We also need to be aware of what is going on in our minds, and to be aware of our reactions as well. Does irritation arise in reaction to that pointing out of the bit of egg still on the frying pan? Noticing and owning that is also part of the practice, as much as is being thorough when we do things. As we encounter situations, as we encounter people, things, are we reacting or are we responding? Are we getting irritated and if so, who is it that is getting irritated? Where is this irritation coming from? Try to trace it down into the depths of your body, into the depths of your mind.

It's not about somebody else doing something to us. To react or respond, the choice is ours. Nobody else is responsible for our reactions in life than we ourselves. The more clear we can be in our activities, the fewer reactions we'll have and the more responses we'll have—and the cleaner and clearer and more rich and fulfilled and simple our life will be. This is the vital practice in action that Hakuin said is ten thousand times ten thousand times more effective than practice on the cushion.

For the practice in action to function, however, that practice on the cushion is essential, so both are very important. As for our practice, it's not just about experiencing the extension of our out breath and reaching far beyond what we may think or feel or understand, and of being open and curious all the way through that out breath. It's not just about working with a koan. These are the basic fundamentals of our practice, the essentials of our practice. But without that next step of taking it into our daily life, it's of little use. It won't bring us lasting peace and happiness unless we integrate it because only then will our life change, only then will we become more free. That freedom is freedom from the stuff we would otherwise ordinarily be caught in.

You all have heard the story of Jacques Lusseyran, the young French man who was blinded at the age of eight in a school accident. His eyesight wasn't that great to begin with so he was wearing glasses and this was before they had lenses that were shatterproof. His classmates were rushing out to recess and somebody shoved him from behind, he stumbled into the edge of the teacher's desk and that was the end of his sight.

His parents seem to have been quite enlightened and they didn't view his blindness as the end of his life, as some people would. They worked with the school and made it possible for Jacques to be mainstreamed. As a result, he stayed in his regular school; all he had to do was learn Braille during the summer, which he did quickly. In this way he was able to continue through grade school and through high school with his classmates. He even used to go hiking

in the mountains with them. Through it all he developed a deep sense of people and things. Interestingly, he wrote that as a child he realized that if he got angry or possessive, suddenly he was stumbling into things; his sense of where things were in his environment would vanish. But when he kept his mind clear and unattached to results he had no problem moving around among obstacles that he couldn't literally see. It's an interesting lesson for all of us.

As you also have heard, when he was in high school, France was invaded by Nazi Germany and people began to disappear—people that he and his high school friends respected and felt were wonderful, interesting people—like the uncle of one of their classmates. They also noticed that the French people were becoming quite frightened as a result of Nazi propaganda. And so they decided to do something about it. They rightly guessed that the Nazis would ignore high school kids pedaling around on their bicycles with papers in the basket, figuring they were just kids taking their homework home or going to school. They managed to get hold of clandestine radios and listened to Allied news. And they began to print the news of what was really happening. For two years they pedaled these newspapers all over France every two weeks. It seems to have helped a great deal; but the Nazis finally managed to infiltrate the resistance group—though only up to a point.

Jacques, being as perceptive as he was, was the one who made decisions about who was to be included in the resistance group and who wasn't, and there was one man about whom he had doubts. He felt something was wrong with this guy, that he wasn't honest. But because he came recommended by somebody whom Jacques did trust he went ahead and accepted him. It was exactly that person who betrayed them. But because they were very careful in how they organized the group, only about twenty-two of the over 500 members were actually picked up because the rest were unknown.

First, they were put in French prison and then they were taken to Buchenwald where Jacques was put into what was known as the invalid's

block. All of the prisoners' barracks in that concentration camp were extremely overcrowded, but the invalids' block was even more so. Jacques wrote that even where 400 men would be a crowd, they had a thousand in the invalids' building, and it was not possible to move without bumping into another body. It was pretty wretched for everyone, including, for the first five months, Jacques.

He wasn't immediately put to death on entering the camp because one of the intake prisoners whispered to him that he should identify himself as a translator, which he did. He said he was translator of Russian, Polish and another language, and so he was spared.. Even though he didn't know two of those languages, by the time he left camp he did. But because he was blind, other desperate prisoners stole his bread. The prisoners were not fed adequately—a little soup and a crust of bread—and he had even less to eat. Eventually after five months of hell—people were dying all around him, shot or knifed by sadistic guards or strangled by fellow prisoners gone berserk or felled by the rocks in the quarry in which they were required to work—or marched out as a group to the tunes of a band and ceremoniously executed—and other people were going crazy; some were in there because they were known to be insane. It was truly a hell realm. After five months, he couldn't take it anymore and he became quite ill. In many, many different ways his body was shutting down. His heart was beating wildly and out of control. His kidneys were failing. His guts were writhing in extreme pain. His face was swollen up with some kind of infection. Doctors in the camp who were prisoners themselves, later identified his conditions. There was not a single bit of medicine in the camp, and when it became clear that he was dying, a couple of other prisoners took him away to what they euphemistically called "the hospital," which was a piece of concrete somewhere outdoors, and laid him down to die.

What did he do then? He tuned in to exactly what was going on in every part of his body—and ***this is important to remember: despite the fact that it was extremely painful, even***

frightening, he tuned in. This is an important key for working with stuff that comes up in our mind. Tune in. Don't think about it. Ignore the thoughts and ***feel it.*** Feel the sensations in the body. Is it tight in the shoulders? Are the hands cold? Is there tension in the back? What about the belly, how does that feel? That's often a dead giveaway.

And in tuning in so completely, Jacques came to a deep awakening. In the middle of hell, he came to a deep awakening. This is something else to keep in mind because we all have our stuff, and some of us no doubt have stuff from childhood that is perhaps quite frightening, perhaps quite painful. Zazen is going to take the lid off of all of that if we allow it to do so. And as it begins to do so, it's important to walk right in. If it is extreme, then it is also important to get the assistance of a mental health professional; a good therapist can help us process this kind stuff. Even if we do therapy, when in combination with zazen we can make great strides through our stuff and have a truly positive effect. Three therapists who are or have been members of the Rochester Zen Center have reported that Zen practitioners doing therapy progress much faster in their therapy than other clients who are not Zen practitioners—who did not have that extra, very effective tool in their hands.

Jacque Lusseyran had a deep awakening experience as a result of tuning in, not tuning out, not trying to avoid feeling what he was feeling but going right into it. And the amazing thing about this is that he found joy in the middle of that hell realm. He found joy! That awakening showed him a far deeper, freer picture, a truer picture—and through that he found joy. Furthermore, he wrote that that joy never left him despite it being eleven more months before the Allies liberated the camp. The joy never left him....

Remarkably as well, after that nobody stole his bread. Instead, fellow prisoners would wake him in the middle of the night and lead him to prisoners who were freaking out; Jacques could, simply with his presence, calm the other men down. He brought peace to people be-

cause he felt it intimately himself, despite the outward circumstances of his environment.

This is a choice we also have. It doesn't matter what happens to us in a certain sense. Of course, if there is something that can be done about abuse, for example, then it's appropriate to do that something. But with situations that we cannot get ourselves out of (not to mention those we can solve), how we respond to those situations makes all the difference in the world. And how much zazen we have done before that point makes that difference—as with Shido Munan being able to receive that baby without reacting in anger and self-defense. He simply received the baby and carried it around on his back like an old grandmother, working in his garden, trying to raise food so they could eat, because the villagers had scorned him.

To recapitulate, practice is two-fold: We do zazen, through which we work to clarify our mind. If thoughts come, let them come. Just don't get wrapped up in them; if you find yourself chasing them, become aware of that and taste it, then return to extending the outbreath with greater commitment and attention. Give yourself more completely to that out breath! Reach deep within; where is that awareness coming from?! Eventually, the thoughts will kind of disappear on their own. You don't have to get rid of them, and in fact, we don't want to try to get rid of them for two reasons. One is that they will get stronger if we try to and the other is that we don't want to bring ourselves to where we can't think, because thinking is an important tool. It's just not everything that we think it is. It's useful, but there's plenty more that can be done very effectively in our life, even more effectively in our life, if we do it from a place beyond thought.

So, first take that practice deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper. It's like exploring under water in a way; you swim deeper and deeper down, and what amazing views you can open to! There's no end to that deepening potential. Dogen said it as well: "There's no beginning to enlightenment and there's no end to practice." We're already there. We just don't recognize it.

This incredible zazen practice is about uncovering that awakened Mind.

Then equally essential, the accompanying work is to bring that increasing clarity and insight to life in every thing we do or say or think. It's the most important thing a human being can do. Moreover, it's deeply fulfilling—and compassion and wisdom arise all along the way.

We have as well a third aspect to practice, if you will, and that is the precepts. In Rinzai and also in Soto Zen there are sixteen precepts known as the Bodhisattva Precepts. These are both guidelines to those of us who aren't completely awakened and haven't completely integrated that awakening into our daily life and as well, they're a description of how someone who is completely awakened and that awakening integrated would naturally behave without any "shoulds" or "oughts." When we come to one of these precept ceremonies—traditionally known as Jukai, which means both receiving the precepts and giving the precepts—and we vow to keep these sixteen precepts, it goes deep into our psyche; each time we do it again it goes a little bit deeper. And as our practice continues to unfold, we begin to be able to manifest those precepts far more freely, far more easily.

Think about this, and consider this as well: There are four precepts regarding speech because speech is one of the most difficult things for human beings to bring forth compassionately and wisely. Those four precepts regarding speech are some of the most difficult precepts to keep: especially important is the precept of not speaking ill of others. This causes a great deal of suffering, particularly if it's done in a sangha. Sangha is our family. We practice together and it's important to support each other, not to cut each other down. In a previous Oak Tree, our journal, our bimonthly journal for the Hidden Valley Zen Center, there was a much more extensive writing on living the precepts. If you haven't read it already, or even if you have, if you reread it periodically it can serve as an assistance in your practice.

Thank you for listening; now, the Four Vows.

Free the Mind - a Documentary

There's something healing about simply watching "Free the Mind," Danish filmmaker Phie Ambo's gentle, compassionate documentary spotlighting the use of such drug-free options as meditation and mindfulness to treat anxiety and trauma.

Writer-director Ambo focuses on three main subjects: Will, an endearing 5-year-old with ADHD and a fear of elevators; Steve, an Afghanistan war veteran haunted by his stint as a military intelligence soldier and interrogator; and Rich, a former battalion leader in Iraq wracked by guilt and horrific memories of combat. Fueled by the subtle parallels between young Will and the adult Steve and Rich, the movie follows the trio through brief, life-changing experiments overseen by neuroscientist Richard Davidson.

Davidson, who founded the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, believes the brain can be physically altered by the power of thought. Thus he guides the veterans toward peace and happiness through meditation, yoga and breathing exercises.

Meanwhile, Will, with the help of some wonderful special teachers, undergoes similar anti-anxiety routines plus other child-g geared calming practices. The results for all are hopeful and inspiring, though their work is clearly not done. Affecting private moments with the PTSD-affected Steve and Rich, as well as with Will's kindly foster parents, further enhance this nicely edited film's deeply human dimension.

This movie is not available on the net, but is traveling to various cities in the United States and showing at movie theaters, including in San Diego. It is well worth seeing! **"Free the Mind" is showing in San Diego June 28th at Town Square 14.** To find other showings in other areas and at other dates you can check Davidson's website <http://www.international-filmcircuit.com/freethemind/index.html>



*Mountain Gate is proud to announce that our nonsectarian outreach program, **Regaining Balance Retreats for Women Veterans with PTSD**, has been accepted to the **Give Grande New Mexico DAY OF GIVING, May 6th**. On that day anyone living anywhere—you don't have to live in New Mexico—can make a donation to any of 435 nonprofits in NM, including Regaining Balance. **On May 6th, simply go to www.givegrandenm.org, search for "Regaining Balance" and your tax-deductible donation—which will be matched—can be made.***

Veterans in general and women veterans in particular are underserved in New Mexico, where the Veterans Administration is severely overtaxed by the sheer numbers of veterans needing help. Mountain Gate's Regaining Balance program—www.RegainingBalance.org—teaches significant tools such as the grounding breath meditation we practice in the zendo, plus journaling, art therapy, and the power of physical exercise out in nature, to women vets suffering from post-traumatic stress; these tools help center and reduce stress in these women who have risked their very lives for our country.

Our first retreat in September 2013 was so well received we have been asked to offer further retreats and include women partners/spouses of vets. But Mountain Gate needs help to do so. Your donation on May 6th is deeply appreciated!

May 10 All-Day Sitting; it's the regular All-Day Schedule and will be put on HVZC's Facebook page.

May 14-18 Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with PTSD and Women Partners of Veterans with PTSD at Mountain Gate. These retreats are limited to the women described above. Regaining Balance is a non-religious outreach program of Mountain Gate. It is entirely free to the women it hosts, and except for airfare to New Mexico for facilitators living out of State, all facilitators are pro bono. There are real expenses, however, and donations are most welcome. A check made to Mountain Gate is tax deductible to the full extent of the law, and when so specified, will be used to help underwrite these retreats.

May 30-June 3 4-Day Sesshin in Lawrenceville NJ; to apply, email scott@tcnj.edu.

June 6-13 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; application deadline is May 30.

June 20-22 Weekend Sesshin; Roshi expects to be at HVZC June 16-23.

July 8-15 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; application deadline is June 24.

July 26-August 2 7-Day Sesshin. This is our only 7-day sesshin of the year, the only chance without going to Mountain Gate to do a full seven days of deepening practice. Yasutani-roshi has said that to do a 7-day sesshin was equivalent to two to three years of daily practice.

PLEASE NOTE: *the August 7-day sesshin at Mountain Gate has been cancelled due to its too-close proximity to the Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with PTSD.*
August 22-24 Regaining Balance Weekend

Retreat for Women Partners of Veterans with PTSD, at Mountain Gate; see May entry for details.

September 17-21 Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with PTSD at Mountain Gate. (see May entry for details)

September 27 All-Day Workshop on Rinzai Zen, led by Mitra-roshi. Please go to www.hvzc.org to download an application form. Roshi will be at HVZC Sep 26-Oct 3.

September 29 HVZC ANNUAL MEETING - *Please note! We need a quorum in order to cover business, so please put this important date on your calendars! It's the only time in the year where the whole sangha meets to make decisions about the Center!*

October 15-22 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; application deadline Oct. 10.

October 24-26 Weekend Work Sesshin; Roshi expects to be at HVZC October 24-31.

November 19-26 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; application deadline November 2.

November 31-December 8 Rohatsu Sesshin at Mountain Gate; applications due by Nov. 18

2015 Calendar

January 6-13 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; applications due by January 1st.

January 28-February 1 4-Day Sesshin; *February 2nd is a Free Day with no formal sittings that day.* Roshi expects to be at HVZC Jan 27-Feb 3.

March 7-14 7-Day Sesshin at Turtleback Zendo; for info please contact scott@tcnj.edu

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A monk in all earnestness asked Joshu, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West? Joshu answered, "The oak tree in the garden!"