

Jan Chozen Bays- "...One Koan"

(Continued from page 6.)

Another example. A student came to me in sesshin, unsure if she should work on Zen koans because she was a Catholic. I asked her if she had any questions within Catholicism which were bothering her. She said that she had been worried over the question "Is there anything outside the will of God?" Perfect koan! She worked intently on it all sesshin. In Zen terms we could re-phrase it, "Is there anything outside of Buddha nature?" Is jealousy outside the will of God? Is child abuse outside the will of God? Is a toilet brush outside of Buddha nature?

This is precisely Joshu's Mu, the first case in Mumonkan. "Does a dog have Buddha nature?" The exact wording doesn't matter so much when someone has a koan which has grabbed them by the throat and gives them little rest.

There are koans everywhere. Take AIDS. It stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Take it one word at a time. What does *acquired* mean? The dictionary is one of my favorite Zen texts. I use it when I'm stuck and can't get "inside" a word in a koan. Acquire means to come into possession of. It comes from ad + quaerere, to seek, obtain. Do we acquire a thing out of the blue? Do we have to seek it or be accessible to it in some way? Is there a mutual relationship between the thing acquired and the acquirer?

(No, I'm not talking about that tired New Age notion that people bring on their illnesses and can get rid of them if they only try hard enough. And by referring to a dictionary I'm not speaking about an intellectual dissection of each word in a koan. I'm talking about using any tool to help immerse ourselves in the koan the way a swimmer is immersed in water...only more intimate...breathe, eat, sleep, walk and sweat the koan.)

There is the koan "The Buddha Holds Out a Flower". Seeing the flower, Mahakashyapa was enlightened. Ananda, the Buddha's cousin and devoted follower, asked Mahakashyapa after the Buddha's death, "What did the Buddha transmit to you besides the gold kesa?" He was hoping to "acquire" the same thing that the Buddha "gave" to Mahakashyapa. What is it we acquire or "un-acquire" with Zen practice?

How about *deficiency*? Is there any deficiency anywhere? Isn't everything whole and complete just as it is? What do we lack that we seek in practicing Zen? This is the koan of Enyadetta, who thought she lost her head and had to work hard to find it again.

Do I use koans with every student? No, only the ones who wish to use them, or those who have already been seized by the throat by a koan they can't shake. Do I follow the entire formal system of koan study? I haven't started a student on it yet, but it may become appropriate in the future. I am too young as a teacher to have settled upon a way of working, and students are too diverse to have one course of study for all.

I feel that my own formal koan study was immensely valuable, testing and deepening in a way that would be difficult to reproduce out of the blue. When it becomes appropriate, I would be honored to offer that experience to another student. I loved, hated, delighted in and dreaded koan study. I looked forward to each new koan like a new food to be tried...kind of like working your way through a huge cookbook, recipe by recipe. I wanted to chew them up and digest them. I'd finish one and be full, and sometimes exhausted, and then I'd be starved for more. Nourishing and delicious.

It was also horrible...when big chunks fell away. Like having your house hit by a wrecking ball. I dreaded going in to dokusan (private interview) to present my answer, to face those hard eyes that brooked no hesitancy and saw any unclarity instantly. I often emerged with sweat running in little streams under my arms. I would go back to the zafu after my "answer" had been rejected, sit, mad, for an hour or a day, sure that I had explored all that a particular koan had to offer, then sigh and plunge back in. Sure enough, another level would open up.

Anyone who practices is working on koans, whether acknowledged or not, whether we adopt or reject the formal koan system. We are working on the koan that underlies all koans, we are this fundamental koan, "Who am I?"

Soen Sa Nim Interview

(Continued from page 3.)

Our style of kong-an practice means not holding kong-an. The old style was to go into the mountains, cut off outside world and just work on one kong-an. Our style of practice means to learn how to function correctly in everyday life through kong-an practice. So, when you are doing something, just do it. In that doing, there is no thinking, no subject, no object. Inside and outside become one.

In our style of practice, correct kong-an practice, correct life and correct direction are all the same. If we make our everyday life clear, then kong-an practice is no problem. Then kong-an practice is not special.

If our everyday life is clear, then kong-an practice is not necessary. Then kong-

an practice is not for me. It is only to teach other people. So we use kong-ans, old kong-ans and new kong-ans, only to teach other people. Sometimes a person's own life may be very clear, but they don't understand how to teach other people how to function correctly in everyday life. Also, they don't understand how to teach truth and correct way. When clear life, truth, and correct way come together in a meticulous way, moment-to-moment, that's kong-an practice. Only "my life is clear" is not enough. For example, if you eat only one kind of food all the time, your body will have a problem. So, your body needs different kinds for a good balance, for a correct body.

PP: Can you explain your system of kong-an teaching? What are the different kinds of *like this* kong-ans you use?

SSN: We use four kinds of *like this* kong-ans:

WITHOUT LIKE THIS = True Emptiness = Primary Point
= Silence
= Complete Stillness

Example kong-ans: "What is true emptiness?" "What is complete stillness?"

BECOME ONE LIKE THIS = KATZ! = Correct demonstration of Primary Point
= Hit

Example kong-ans: Buddha picked up a flower, Mahakasyapa smiled. What does it mean?

ONLY LIKE THIS = Meaning is Truth = True function of Primary Point

Example kong-ans: Spring comes, grass grows by itself. 3x3=9. "What is Buddha?" "Three pounds of flax."

JUST LIKE THIS = Just doing is correct life = One-point Correct Function

Example kong-ans: Go drink tea. Go wash your bowls.

We can understand these four kinds of kong-ans in this way. You go into the interview room; the teacher places a cup and pen before you and asks you if the cup and the pen are the same or different. The four kinds of *like this* answers will be:

WITHOUT LIKE THIS = Maintain complete silence, a don't know mind.

BECOME ONE LIKE THIS = Hit the floor or shout KATZ!

ONLY LIKE THIS = Saying "cup is cup, pen is pen"

JUST LIKE THIS = Drink from the cup, write with the pen.

SSN: So, "Just like this" is Just Doing It, Correct Function, Correct Everyday Life.

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