

TRANSMISSION CEREMONY FOR

Zen Master Jok Um (Ken Kessel)

Transmission ceremony at Providence Zen Center, U.S.A., on April 1, 2017

DHARMA COMBAT

Quinn PSN: Roses are red. Violets are blue. The Buddha never got it . . .

Zen Master Jok Um: How about you?



Question: Is there a difference between a person who's crazy and a person who's a liar?

Zen Master Jok Um: *[Laughs loudly for a while.]* Was that crazy or a lie?

Q: It's crazy, I think.

ZMJU: Thank you for telling the truth.



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Keeler PSN: For years, you taught the Sunday meditation for beginners at Chogye International Zen Center on Sunday nights. I must have seen it maybe 50 or 75 times, and it was wonderful teaching. You always said the same thing every time. I remember one of the things you used to say was, "Zen comes from a Sanskrit word dhyana, which means absorption." And there were all these other things. But there was one part in there, that even after I heard it 75 or 100 times, I could never figure out exactly what you were saying. So, what is that teaching that I didn't understand?

Zen Master Jok Um: That's a very long question.

Keeler PSN: Only that?

ZMJU: Go drink tea.

DHARMA SPEECH

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

That was a short story.

How long did it last?

The short story means the wisdom of Buddha or Buddha-Prajna. So where do you find Buddha-Prajna?

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]



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That was a middle length story. That's longer than a short story. A middle length story is the wisdom of dharma. Moment by moment by moment, each particle of dust contains the world. That's longer.

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

That was a very long story. A very long story is Sangha-Prajna. Sentient beings are numberless, so that never ends. If we want to put together a short story, a medium story, and a long story, we have to perceive Sangha-Prajna, Dharma-Prajna, and Buddha-Prajna. So which kind of story is the right kind of story?

KATZ!

[Someone in audience yells in surprise.]

Thank you!

Clouds become rain. Rain becomes snow. Snow becomes water. Water becomes us. What kind of story do you have?

Our teaching is transmitted mind to mind, as Zen Master Wu Kwang said, meaning true intimacy face-to-face, moment-to-moment, with each moment that we encoun-

ter. But we don't see that, so we grope around in a blind kind of way, feel lost, make suffering for ourselves and make suffering for others. So Buddha-Prajna means wake up to your original nature. That's not a story. And it's not an idea.

Once a monk came to Zen Master Un Mun and said, "If a blind, deaf and mute person were to come, how would you teach them?" Un Mun said, "Come forward." So the monk came forward, and as he did, Un Mun poked his stick at him, and the monk jumped back. Un Mun said, "You're not blind." Then, Un Mun said, "Bow." The monk bowed. Un Mun said, "You're not deaf." Then he asked, "Do you understand?" The monk said, "I don't, Master." Un Mun said, "You're not mute." And at that, the monk got enlightenment. So what kind of enlightenment is "I don't understand, Master?"

That's interesting. If we're not busy containing things by how we wish to shape them, then maybe we can see that we're neither blind nor deaf nor mute, and then the moment becomes our teacher. We first become students of the moment. "Students of the moment" means always perceive original nature everywhere. That's very easy to say, but as an old eighty-year-old Zen master sitting in a tree once said, "That's easy for a five-year-old to understand, very difficult for an eighty-year-old to practice." There's always an opportunity to become clear. There's always an opportunity to be distracted.

The wisdom of dharma is things unfolding moment to moment before us. That's truth appearing every moment. So saying that the rain becomes the snow, the snow becomes water, the water becomes you, pointing to your immediate experience, this is red, this is orange, that's truth speaking to you moment to moment, also.

A long time ago, when Am Du visited Dok Sahn, he stood in the doorway before him and rather than entering or leaving, he shouted, "Holy or unholy?" And Dok Sahn just shouted, "KATZ!" Am Du bowed and left. This story got around and around and around and around, and finally somebody made a comment, "Only Dok Sahn could have handled Am Du." When that got back to Am Du, he said, "That person doesn't understand. At that moment I was lifting him up with one hand, and putting him down with the other."

Lifting up with one hand and putting down with the other sounds like a compliment and an insult. But if you think of it as a compliment and an insult, then there's something that's not clear about skillful means. Because lifting up and putting down are natural, like breathing in



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and breathing out, or the heart going *boom-boom boom-boom boom-boom*. I make a sound; you hear a sound. I make a shout; a child goes, "Huh?!" So that kind of lifting up and putting down goes beyond insults and compliments and is the process of the world and us shaping each other together. When Am Du said that, then the person he was speaking with asked, "How did you become such an empty-headed fellow?" That's one of those Chinese Zen compliments. And Am Du said, "I never deceive myself."

That's an interesting thing to say, "I never deceive myself." A bold thing to say. How many of us can actually say that and mean it? "I never deceive myself." *I* and *myself* and *deceive* suggest subject-action-object, but subject-action-object is already deceiving yourself. So maybe another way of saying it is "I always rest with my true nature." That may be something that's more graspable than "I never deceive myself," because if you're busy never deceiving yourself, you spend a lot of time trying not to do something. And it's really hard not to do something. Except when you're sitting and then it's really good not to do very much. Because if you don't do very much when you're sitting, then your original nature shines clearly and brightly, and you can start to perceive it moment to moment to moment.

Am Du's successor, Soeng Am Eon once said, "Never be deceived by others, any day, any time." "I never deceive myself" becomes "Never be deceived by others." This moves

from dharma to sangha. Moving from dharma to sangha means don't just perceive my original nature, because it doesn't belong to me. If you want to truly be a student, we have almost a hundred opportunities here and every place you walk, there's always an opportunity to become a student of what's just before you. Can you perceive mind-light in what's just before you? Because if you do that, then what's before you genuinely becomes your teacher. If you're a student, then you're receptive, and humble and caring and grateful and engaged and responsive. Learning how to be a student isn't that hard, because that's what we're already born with.

We had a baby-naming ceremony earlier today. The older sister and the baby sister were looking intently and wordlessly at each other: "Ahhhh!" What is that? It's a really profound connection, some wordless experience of the meaning of being in each other's presence. This itself lives underneath what we say, what we think we mean, how we think we feel, what we think we intend. There's something alive in the shape of you and who stands before you, and you're standing together, creating a shape together. And if you both stand in that openly, receptively, then that's already a teaching for both of you.

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Then Sangha-Prajna has an interesting aspect to it. I read an interesting translation about the story of Oh Jo's water buffalo. Our translation says, "Master Oh Jo said, 'It's like a water buffalo passing through a window. Its head, horns and four legs have already passed through. Why is it that its tail cannot?'" In a book that I was given to review by Yamada Roshi, he tells the story like this: "It's like a water buffalo leaving his enclosure. The head, horns and legs have already passed through. Why it is that the tail doesn't escape?" That's a slightly different angle on it. Our translation of Mu Mun's comment says, "Passing through, it falls into a ditch. Turning back, it is destroyed. This trivial tail; just this is very weird." But the first two lines of Yamada Roshi's translation are, "If he escapes, he falls to his death. If he turns back, he's slaughtered." So slaughtered and destroyed are a little different, right? If you think of an animal bred to become food, at some point, they're kept in an enclosure. If you stay in the enclosure, eventually you're killed, and you become somebody's food. And maybe if you escape, you fall. But that's our sense of our lives. We're trying to break out of something and become free. That's an interesting thing to try to do, but you can't do it through what you think it's like. Because what you think it's like is what keeps us in prison.

The tail never leaves. What is it that never leaves when



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you break free? Maybe that's our connection to this world. Not just me breaking free for me, but me breaking free until my eyes see, my ears hear, my nose smells, my skin touches, my tongue tastes, my mind thinks. We say the six gates. Meaning moment by moment by moment, we can live clearly, compassionately, wisely, just in touch with the world. If we hold, if we cling, that's the six poisons, eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind. If we're seduced by our senses, then we want more of something and less of something else, and we never see what's in front of us at all.

So then, those who are close to us are our best teachers. Having some sense of what's closest to us allows us to learn from those who are close to us. So please let's rest our minds on what's close to us and then learn from what's close to us, how to live, how to be really human, how to be generous, compassionate and wise.

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

Rose are red.

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

Violets are blue.

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

Buddha didn't understand.

How about you? ♦