

November 4, 2009, Olympia Zen Center
Teisho by Eido Frances Carney

Guishan's "You Have to Find Out for Yourself"

When I first came to practice, I had a koan and a question. These are two very different things to me. The koan that I had was the same koan that Dogen Zenji had. I knew nothing about Dogen Zenji, but I had the koan that Dogen Zenji had, which was, if we are already enlightened, why do we have to practice zazen ?

I was just a beginning practitioner but I already had that question from the very beginning. I think many people must feel the same way. I had already made the decision to get up every morning and drive to the zendo, it was about 12 miles, and I drove every morning, and I sat in that cold darkness. It wasn't as cold as here, it was in California, mind you, but it was dark and my bones ached and my knees and ankles were on fire, and my head drooped and all those things that we feel when we first begin to sit zazen. Why do we have to do this?

And I just dreaded getting onto that cushion because the bell would ring, and then it sometimes seemed like the abyss of zazen that would go on forever. And when would that bloody bell ring? You know you just have that feeling when you are in that miserable situation. My koan was also "why am I doing this?" along with "why are we doing this if we are already enlightened?" And I fully believed we were already enlightened. I had enough experience to know that we're enlightened. And there is no easy answer to that koan except to sit through the practice to understand why Dogen Zenji continued to sit zazen. And I guess I am still here too. So this is forty years later.

So I had that koan, that was very difficult, and a painful one to go through, but nevertheless a very incredible koan to have.

But my question was a little bit different. My question was, "So what can I rely on?" What can I count on? Okay, I have this practice where I'm doing it anyway even though I don't know why, because we're already enlightened. So then in the middle of that, "What can I count on?" What can I rely on? It was the very first question I asked my first teacher when I began practice. It's very deep a matter, a serious question and even though it may not be a burgeoning spiritual question for you, I certainly know you've all had that question in your mind at one time or another. When the chips are down and there is nothing else there, and when you don't have anybody else to call on, when you just don't know anything else, what can you count

on? You feel maybe a little friendless, you feel everything is falling apart. What can you count on?

Although I have certainly answered that for myself, I haven't answered it forever. That is to say, that question returns because we don't come to some strong realization in practice and never have it occur again. We may realize something one day, and then a year, five, ten, how many years later, it comes back and we review it again and we discover a new depth. So we explore it again and again. Even if we have an awakening experience, we give that away, and we continue to practice zen, we come to something deeper again. There is no end to the depth. Like driving in the mountains. If you enter the mountain range, you see the mountains and you enter the first mountain and you think, oh that's it, and then you see another mountain range, and they go on and on. You come around that curve and there is another mountain! On and on like that. Of course it depends on which mountain range whether you get past that mountain range pretty quickly or not.

There are numerous koans that speak about this, "What can I rely on?" One of them I'm sure many of you have read before.

Ruiyan, practiced at his temple, Ruiyanji, and he climbed up the hill and he sat on a rock and he called: "Master!" He himself answered "What?" He then called, "Stay alert!"

"Yes!"

"And in the future, don't be deceived by anyone!"

"Yes! Yes !"

So, Ruiyan would do that everyday, talking to himself. He would go up on the mountain, sit on the rock, and call, "Master!"

"What?"

You yourself can do that every morning. You can wake up and you can say, "Joan !" or "Mary!" or whatever your name is.

Then you can answer, "What?"

"Don't be deceived by anyone. Stay alert !"

"Yes!"

You can do that to remind yourself.

Remind yourself! That's the very first answer that I got from my teacher when I asked that question at a morning practice. We ask the question in Sanzen, we go down and kneel in front of the teacher and give the question. I asked, "What can I rely on?" Of course the answer was, "Well, nothing." There's nothing, nothing. Just like that, "Nothing." That is very hard to hear, when perhaps, as in my own case, I came out of a very, very different spiritual context from Zen Buddhism, in which I had an

old man in the sky in Christianity whom I could call on and I could say: “God!” and then no voice would come. But still you continue: “Help me, help me, I think I'm fading.” Nothing comes, no answer comes but you think some kind of answer is coming, and you feel better because you called up into the sky, you called upon this God that you have faith in. I'm not making fun of this by the way, I'm addressing it very seriously. There is great solace in that calling upon God and feeling that somebody is with you. Feeling that you're answered in some way, by that calling.

My very first teacher used to address this matter. Now in the U.S., even though we have a very strong fundamentalist country, I think that the people who came to practice in those days, forty years ago, were somehow closer to their religious practice than folks today. I could be very wrong about that, that's how it seemed. People came to practice with a very deep question about God and about this calling upon somebody and its presence.

Kobun Roshi used to pose questions. He would say: “When you are playing the piano, and no one is there, who are you playing for? When you are praying, when you are calling into the sky, who are you calling?”

This master Ruiyan knew that answer. He knew who he was calling on. He knew where that question of God is. “Master! Master! He immediately answered: “What?”

Not very long ago, at Panorama City, we were having a discussion about this, about who do you rely on, is there some comfort, and what happens and where do you go? Where do you go for solace? I admitted in front of all of them that there are many days when I do wish I had an old man in the sky that I could call on. That I could see there is just somebody there to say, “Hey, could you listen for a minute?” And it isn't that that old man in the sky is not there either. Because who are we calling on when we are saying, “Is somebody there, hello? Master, is there somebody there?” Well you know, the koans all, don't give you an old man in the sky answer!

I'll read another koan from the *THE TRUE DHARMA EYE, ZEN MASTER DOGEN'S THREE HUNDRED KOANS* (Translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi and John Daido Looi. Shambhala, 2005). Dogen Zenji, who is the founder of our stream of Soto Zen, culled these three hundred koans from the Chinese that influenced his teachings, and some of them appear in his *SHOBOGENZO*, and other teachings. This particular one is Guishan's “You have to find out for yourself!”

MAIN CASE

Guishan was once asked by commander Lu in the monastics' hall, “Among these advanced monastics, who are meal servers and who are meditators ?”

Guishan said: “There are no meal servers and no meditators.”

Lu said: “Then what are they doing here?”

Guisha said: “Officer you will have to find out for yourself!”

COMMENTARY

Commander Lu was a frequent visitor to mount Gui and often engaged in dialogs with Guishan and his successor Yangshan. Here he asks which of the monastics are servers and which are meditators. Guishan can see that the real question is still hidden and tries to bring it out, saying that there are no servers or meditators. The real question appears, “Then what are they doing here?”

Haven't you heard the saying: “If you want to attain intimacy, don't approach it with questions?” Guishan says, “You will have to find that out for yourself.” How touching. In a single phrase the old master opens up a path for him to follow. From ancient times to the present, buddhas and ancestors have never spoken a word for the people. This practice of not helping people, should be investigated thoroughly. Even an answer that is sweet as honey, when clearly understood, turns out to be just another poison. You just have to find out for yourself.

CAPPING VERSE

Buddhas and ancestors have not appeared in the world,
nor is there any truth to be given to the people.
They are just able to observe the hearts of beings
and dispense medicine according to their ills.” (1)

This is a big koan, “You have to find out for yourself.”

It is a big koan because it is certainly a lifelong one that goes with us forever, that no matter where we go, and what we do, no matter how many times we call on God, and even feel the solace of that calling, we are thrown back unto ourselves. Even the teachings, in all the religions that have God, we are thrown back unto ourselves. That God throws us back onto ourselves to say, “Well, where are you? Show yourself!”

This is one of these things that makes our Buddhist practice so difficult, because when we truly want some solace, it is a difficult matter. Yet we think that there is no solace in calling, “Master” and answering, “What?” And yet if we really, really do that, when we really summon ourselves to respond, there is tremendous solace in that! Because we know that's the truth. We know the truth lies only there and not outside any place else. So there's tremendous solace in it, but it doesn't look like that until we

do it. That, of course, is the action of finding out for yourself. An action of calling, “Master!” and answering “What?” Truly answering, “What?” In our hearts that next question comes up. That next gut level, wrenching, suffering, miserable moment in ourselves comes forward, if we are really willing to do that. And it's only in passing through that, in pulling that up out of ourselves, and saying “What?” that we are able to bring it into that moment in which we can address it. And that is true solace.

So, who do you play the piano for, when there is nobody around? Who do you cook for when you are alone ? You're cooking for the master. You're playing the piano for the master. So it's all there! It's entirely all there!

So what can I rely on ? Can I rely enough on the true practice of Emptiness? The true practice of responding to the question of “Master” with a true “What?” when the chips are down and I'm miserable and I'm down and out, and that's it and I can't go on? I've been there, otherwise I would not talk this way.

So this incredible koan, “You have to find out for yourself” is so lifelong and spectacular and affirming, truly affirming in its potential to show us our Way. We know the Way is not found outside of ourselves. We will all come to this. We will all come to this spectacular moment in which we will find out for ourselves. It's just really nice to do it while we're still alive, before that moment of death. We will find out, but it would be so much greater to really live for the sake of living. It is so rare. It is so rare an opportunity to have this life. It won't happen again. This life will not happen again. How much more wonderful to really enter that koan, really look into it, and when you get up tomorrow, well everyday, you say “Master!” and you answer 'YES! What? What?’

The next question comes, but you have to drive to ask what is the next question. Not Guishan's question, not Lu's question, 'What are they doing here ?' that was his huge koan. What is your question? And how much better to do that while we're alive, than to face “I have to find out for myself” at the moment of death when there's no more time to enjoy yourself when you see through it! We are clearly going to find out at the moment of death. We'll find out what life is all about at the moment of death. I suspect that that spectacular moment of death, should we be so lucky as to be conscious. has that moment of finding out. Even if we're not conscious for that last breath, anybody I have ever been with who's dying, has a last moment of consciousness, and in that moment they see it. They see it, their whole life just goes whrrrrrrrrrr, just like that, flashing before them. Their whole precious life spread out, and they just have it all right there. In a

single moment, which is what happens when we awaken. Story after story after story, people will tell you about that moment of kensho, everybody they ever knew, everybody who had impact on their lives, just flashes before them in a moment, whrrrrrrrrrrrrrr! just like that. And they are reconciled with everyone.

We have to do that for ourselves. We have to find out for ourselves. Nobody can do it for us. Nobody can live your life for you. Nobody can ask you a deep question and have it penetrate unless you move the question into your being. Nobody can do it except you.

I remember that moment. I remember it very clearly, when I go back to it now and then, to remind myself, what am I doing here, and why should we have to sit? I remember that moment and I remember where I was. I was standing in the doorway, between the hallway and my bedroom. It was five-thirty in the morning and I'm thinking, "The bed or the car? The bed or the car? I can't go back to bed? No, I have to sit zazen, I want to go back to bed, I want to sit zazen!" Back and forth, back and forth. And I remember the resolve that washed over me in that very moment, that said, "If I do not go and sit, I will never know!"

So, I went, and that resolve stayed.

It's that kind of care of our lives that we engender, that we nurture in zen practice, that we foster, that we cultivate. This is it, this is it! You have to find out for yourself.

One more little piece that I wrote down here, that came as a capping verse from another koan:

"If the student's understanding equals the teacher's
the teaching is diminished by half.
Only when the student has surpassed the teacher,
has the teaching been truly transmitted." (2)

(1) Koan #275, page 374, in THE TRUE DHARMA EYE.

(2) Koan #273, page 372, in THE TRUE DHARMA EYE.