

## 13 July Dharma Talk Hwadu

So Delani asked me to give a little talk on Hwadu.. do people here know what a Koan is? In Japanese Zen or Korean Zen? A Koan is a paradoxical problem. It's a question, and it's a question that a Zen master will ask a Zen student, or it's a problem really. And this problem is paradoxical, it has no logical solution. The only way you can solve the problem to the satisfaction of the Zen master is to open up your mind beyond logic, transcending thoughts yet

C: It's unanswerable

That's not quite true. It is answerable, but the answer does not come from the logical rational mind. So, for example, the most famous koan and the one that Zen students are usually given first is what's called Joshu's dog. The story goes that Joshu who was a Chinese Zen in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century China was outside the temple one day and one of the monks was there and saw a dog walking by, and asked Joshu, "Does a dog have Buddha nature or not?" And Joshu immediately shouted back at him, "Mu!" Actually he shouted, "Wu!" which is the Chinese word for "no," in Japanese that word is "mu," and that's how we know that koan today, as "Joshu's Mu." It means the same thing, it's a negation, it means no or not. So the conundrum, the problem is that the Buddha said that all things have Buddha nature. The monk asked, "Does this dog have Buddha nature?" and Joshu said, "No!"

What did Joshu mean? And so the student is supposed to sit and contemplate that problem and come up with a solution. But the thing is, if the monk comes up with a solution that's coming from his thinking mind that shows he's still mired in thought and emotion dominated consciousness the master will send him out of the room and say, "Sorry, keep trying."

So now in Korean Zen, the Korean principles, or Korean practice adopted this koan practice and they added one principle to it which is called the Hwadu which also comes from the Chinese... Hwadu means the head or the apex. So a Hwadu is a word or phrase that comes from that entire koan, that entire problem that epitomizes, that is the focal point that of the concentration of the student who is attempting to solve it.

So in this case with the koan “Joshu’s Dog,” the Hwadu of that koan is the word “Mu!” which means “not.” So in contemplating this koan the student would sit in meditation, and as he’s meditating – well he would be paying attention to his breath, of course, but instead of counting breath or using the mantra, the student would just be repeating as he breathes in and breathes out this “Mu!” He focuses all of his attention and all of his concentration on it. “Mu!” “Mu!” “Mu!”

And what that does it takes his attention away from emotionally reactive thoughts.

So the Hwadu is this focal point that you keep firmly in the grasp of your mind so that you focus away from the train of thoughts that typically dominates your waking consciousness. So I like to think of Hwadu as being a wedge. If we think of mindfulness or enlightenment being the ability to dwell in the space between the thoughts, how do we create that space? Because for most of us the thoughts just keep happening one after the other after the other after the other without a break. And so, how do we create that space? How do we separate the train?

C: Meditating

Yes, meditation is the way to do that. And Hwadu meditation is one of many ways to do that. As I said, I like to think of the Hwadu meditation is the way like driving a wedge into a piece of wood to split it into two pieces. It is spelled H w a d u, and it is a Korean word that comes, I think a transliteration from the Chinese word that is Hua-t’ou.

C: To make the space to stop thinking.

Yes. Not to stop thinking. Here is one of the most prevalent misconceptions about meditation. Meditation is not designed to stop thinking, because if you try to stop thinking you’re using more thoughts, you are still dwelling in that thought-dominated consciousness. So it’s like fighting fire with fire.

What you want to do is to get into the space between the thoughts so that thoughts. So the thoughts are still there but are not dominating your consciousness anymore. They are there in the background so that they’re not arresting your attention, they’re not arresting your mood, or your emotional reactions. They’re just there.

Q: Isn’t Mu a thought?

Yes, it is a thought, but not the same kind as the thoughts that you are allowing to run through your head, running rampant through your head and dominating consciousness.

C: It’s like a redirection.

Absolutely.

C: An empty thought

Yes. What could be emptier than the word No?

C: Worry thoughts

Exactly correct. The problem is not that we have thoughts, but that we pay too much attention to them. We allow them to dominate our consciousness – and most of them are regrets about the past and worries about the future.

And so Mu is a neutral thought, and it's something that we use to distract ourselves or to focus away from that incessant train of worried thoughts about past and future. Every time we see or feel these thoughts or hear these thoughts coming back trying to grab us and pull us back onto the train – Mu! No. No. No.

That's exactly what Joshu was saying to this monk. This monk was enmeshed in thoughts. Buddha nature, what is that? It's just a concept. We don't want to think about Buddha nature, we want to realize it. We want to experience it. And if this monk keeps on working or dwelling in theory, then he missed, or is missing the point... he's never going to open up to his enlightened-nature.

Q: Are deep thoughts, enlightening thoughts ok?

The problem is not with the thoughts. Whether they are deep thoughts, or enlightening thoughts or anything. Any thoughts are just thoughts, and we have to understand that thoughts are not the real thing – they are abstractions. If any of you watched my video "A Taste of Enlightenment" you understand what the proper place of thoughts is, and how enlightenment is simply opening up to all of the energy, of all the stimulation, to all of the sensations that you are experiencing right now; that you are shutting out because you're too enmeshed in your thoughts. It is just letting thoughts be in the background.

C: Mental constructs

Yes, thoughts are just mental constructs, they are not reality.

C: I am an alcoholic with many spirits in me, I see the world in another way. I am an artist.

Yes. What art is is the ability to see beyond the rational mind, and see the reality that is surrounding us: the beauty and the miraculousness of the energy that is surrounding and permeating us. And being able to take that vision and manifest it in some physical form. Whether it is painting or sculpture or dance, some physical form so that it can be appreciated by others. So an artist is really a channel of the miraculous. And of the miracle that is always around us and in us and is who and what we truly are.

C: A communicator

Yes, absolutely. A communicator of true vision, of true seeing. The highest art is the art that flows from Source Energy of the universe – the aliveness, the wonder, the miracle, the loving conscious energy of the universe. It flows through the mind and the heart and the hands and the body of the artist.. To be able to inspire others. So to be able to give others a glimpse.. to see one's true nature.

C: But a creative one. A message that is communicated so that it can be better understood.

Yes. The artist is a channel and is able to take this message which is incomprehensible to most people because they have not released or dropped the gating mechanisms, or the filters that keep them from seeing reality as it truly is. And what the artist does, because of the gift that he or she has, is to be able to take this energy, this vision and to channel it into a form that can be not only understood by other people who are not yet at that level of openness, but can inspire them to want to feel and experience that same level of awareness.

C: Art has no plan

Absolutely. Art does not come from the rational, logical side of the brain.

C: Emotionally understood

Correct. It is understood with the heart. There is a saying, I forget who said it but, "The heart has its reasons, that reason cannot understand." And we need both. There's nothing wrong with reason, there's nothing wrong with logic, there's nothing wrong with thought. The idea of wanting to kill the ego, to kill thoughts is misguided because they're part of what and who we are also.

All we want to do is put the thoughts, the reason, the rationality into its proper place. All of those things were designed to be our tools. But we've allowed them to be our masters, and we've allowed them to overwhelm the channel of the heart. So that is our task – it is to convince them to reassume their proper place, as servants.

C: Compassion

C: We need to educate the heart as well as the mind, says the Dalai Lama

Yes. Because a mind without a heart will only create disaster.

C: Can be cruel

Yes, a mind without a heart can be cruel.

Q: What is this heart?

Take a breath and pay attention to all that is surrounding you and within you other than your thoughts. That's your heart, that's your true nature, that is all that is.

In my dharma talk yesterday, which you can listen to again because I record all my dharma talks now, I mentioned that enlightenment is simply dropping all of the mental and physiological gating mechanisms that we have created, that keep us from receiving, being permeated, being more permeable to all of the energy that's impinging upon us from all sources in every moment.

C: That which creates compassion, the heart.

Why do you think that when I do the mindfulness exercise at the beginning of every dharma talk that I focus on the heart, instead of on the hara, the center point below the navel? And why do I ask you to imagine that you're breathing in and out through your heart?

C: It is central

Yes, it is the core of your being. And if you understand the phrase, if you've ever heard the phrase, "someone who speaks from the heart," or "someone who listens with their heart," – if you want to be like that, if you want to be a person who speaks from the heart, who acts from the heart, who listens from the heart – that's how you do it. That is a practical technique that you can use to be, to actually experience and act in that way. Not just to think about it, but to focus your attention on your heart, focus your attention on your breath and breathe in and out through your heart. While you're doing whatever it is you're doing – whether you're talking to somebody, listening, or doing some action.

C: My heart was broken 1000 times, but it still works.

Well, your heart was never broken. It may have been pained, certainly, but hearts are unbreakable. Sometimes they get dented and dinged, like if you have a reliable old car that you've had for a long time and which has served you well. You know, you get these dents in a parking lot or a little fender-bender, but it still works and it's still your baby.

So, if you want to live with compassion, if you want to act with compassion, if you want to be compassionate, focus on your heart, focus on your breath, focus away from your thoughts. Breathe in and out from your heart, as often as you can, wherever you are during your day. The opening of the heart chakra is the primary task that humanity has to accomplish in our current day and age. That's the most important job that we have.

Right now. Because all of the problems that we're seeing in the world right now, whatever they are, ALL of them come from a closed off heart. And if each of us takes the responsibility to open our hearts, as often as we can, wherever we are, with whomever we're with, that vibration will spread out and open the heart chakra of the entire planet.

C: But we need our minds afterwards to help us act.

Again I want to emphasize this I am not saying that we want to put away the mind. All we want to put away is the mind's need to control our behavior and our emotions. And then use the mind as the tool it was designed to be. To help us to accomplish in the world the things we need to accomplish.

What would an artist do without his or her mind? It's one thing to be able to channel this experience and this miraculousness, but we also need our mind to actually put it into manifestation, to bring into manifestation. So we need the mind and the heart to become equal partners.

C: I feel scared to open up totally. I become like a vulnerable kid. Or is that my mind babbling?

Well the feeling is real. The fear is real. And the babbling is there too. But the thing to do is not to think about opening up, but just to open up, by doing exactly what it is that I said: to practice that heart-centered breathing. And that will help you to open up and put your mind at ease enough so that the fear starts to subside

Because remember. You already are a Buddha. You already are a Christ. The only thing that keeps you from realizing that, and feeling that and experiencing that.. experiencing it to the core of your being is fear, is the gating mechanisms that we have developed that lock out all the conscious, loving energy that's showering upon us, and within us at every moment.

C: It's funny indeed.. when I feel safe enough, it just happens automatically.

Okay, so what does that tell you? What is the illusion? Is the illusion the safety? Or is the illusion the fear?

What is the illusion and what is the reality? The more you become present, the more you understand and experience that it is the safety that is the reality, and it is the fear that is the illusion. Does that make sense?

But it doesn't mean fighting our fears. We don't want to fight anything. It means embracing our fears the same way we would embrace a frightened little child, and reassure it.

C: Fear is atavistic and it is present always

Well, there are certain fears that we have, but most of the fears that we experience in our day-to-day life are illusions. They're based on thoughts of lack, and separation. They're not objective fears. Like if a tiger walked into the room right now you'd be afraid, because there is an objective threat.

But most of the things that we feel afraid of, they're not fear.. they're anxieties . They're subjective fears. They are just thoughts, illusions.