

Dogen Sangha Summer Sesshin at Earth Spirit, Somerset September 2009

Talk Number 2

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(this talk was given before hearing of John Daido Looi's death in October 2009)

This is from the *'Quarterly Journal of Zen Mountain Monastery'* which is in Upstate New York, I think. John has been there, haven't you, and the master there is John Daido Looi Roshi who is a master in *the 'Rinzai Koan Zen'* and also in the *'subtle Shikantaza method of Soto Zen'*. So he is a master on both sides of the fence. I don't know whether they still do, but they used to have one koan story in every quarterly journal and this is one that I picked out. In fact he and Kazuaki Tanahashi have now published a translation of Dogen's 300 koan stories¹ just after we published ours². This is one from that collection, and I want to look at the koan and John Daido Looi's commentary to investigate the difference between how he looks at koans and how we look at koan stories. I think this is quite important and it is the same theme that I talked about this morning (handout of koan story³).

It's arranged in a rather strange way; 'the main case' means the main koan story. The commentary is Daido Looi's commentary on the koan. I don't really understand what the 'capping verse' is but it's some kind of poetic reply...

The teacher usually sticks it on the end. So if you were doing this kind of thing in a Rinzai setting I think, you would give us the koan and then you would have this capping verse. That is the teacher's version of the story.

To cap it off? Right, ok. So here goes: These koan stories were collections of stories from maybe ninth, tenth century Chinese monasteries and other places where masters and monks studied and lived together and Dogen collected three hundred of those stories and they are scattered all the way through the *Shobogenzo*, where he discussed them. This particular story is also in Dogen's book and it's only three lines here.

"Yunmen said to the assembly, 'In the universe there is a treasure that is hidden in this heap of flesh. It holds up the lantern and goes inside the Buddha Hall. It brings the monastery gate to the top of the lantern.' That is the record of Yunmen's words.

He was talking to his assembled monks and that is what he said and that is the basis of the koan story. John Daido Looi's commentary goes: "Although you may understand Yunmen's, 'It holds up the lantern and goes inside the Buddha Hall', the question is, how do you understand 'It brings the monastery gate to the top of the lantern.' It just cannot be discussed. It is here that Yunmen demonstrates

¹ The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Three Hundred Koans – Dharma Communications

² Master Dogen's Shinji Shobogenzo: 301 Koan Stories – Windbell Publications

³ "It Just Can't Be Discussed", Mountain Record, Winter 2002, page 2

his skill at shattering intellection and dualities. He pulled out the nails, kicked out the wedges and let the whole construct collapse. Only the wonder of the mystery remains. We should enter here. An old master once said 'The spiritual light shines alone, far transcending the senses'. Yunmen has smashed the senses away for you. Are you willing to trust and enter the mystery? Real teachers of our school don't just present Buddhist principles and doctrines, they cut away the complications. Don't you see, self-nature is Buddha nature, the true nature of ignorance is at once Buddhahood; the pure body of illusion is in itself the pure *dharmakaya*. The question remains, where do you find yourself?" That's his commentary. Then there is a capping verse which you can read on your copy and a long discourse which you can read to your heart's content.

Can anybody make any sense of that story?

Not me!

He is deliberately trying to be obscure. He's not trying to clarify the issue. There are more kind of questions in there than... (not audible)

Ah, in the commentary. What about the original koan?

I'd quite like a picture of the monastery and where the lanterns were. He refers to monastery and lanterns but I don't know where they put the lanterns in the monasteries.

Ok; I made a picture. This is my mock-up of a picture. There aren't enough, but pass them round. You can just have a look and pass it on. (Picture shows the temple gate and old monk approaching with a lantern hanging from the end of his staff, casting a bright circle of light in the darkness.)

What is written down for me is that there is a treasure, that there is something that can be found that is freedom. There is something there, there is something that can be found.

Right.

(Inaudible)

It seems like Yunmen is being pretty descriptive. He is holding up his lantern in the dark and all he can see is the temple gate. So there you are. It's quite simple.

Is he saying there is something else that can be illuminated by ...that all is not dark?

'In the universe there is a treasure that is hidden in this heap of flesh.'

The heap of flesh is our body; so the universe is somehow inside that and it holds up the light, you know.

Yes, I know exactly what you mean. (Laughter).

I mean, it's so scary, you can make a hundreds stories out of it. But if I was going to have a go, I'd say: Well the 'heap of flesh' is the human body and you can't separate yourself from everything around you as in 'universe'. So you can't deduct anything from the universe for you to be here. There is not somewhere separate other than... So the two can't exist separately. And 'treasure', I'm guessing is the ability of your body to experience reality.

Right.

Do I get a gold star for that?

Yes, two gold stars.

I think he is talking about simple action; he is just talking about lighting the lamp and the lights.

He is talking about somebody hanging up a lantern, isn't he?

He is talking about someone lighting the lantern that's lighting the ...

Who do you think is hanging up the lantern?

The person that goes into the Buddha Hall.

Who is Yunmen talking about? Himself?

Yes.

So, 'this heap of flesh' is just Yunmen himself.

...who put the lantern up.

So, we wouldn't say 'this heap of flesh' in modern language.

He wouldn't refer to himself as 'it' either.

I don't think he is referring to himself there is he? He is referring to anybody that goes into the Buddha Hall.

What is the Buddha Hall?

This is the Buddha Hall.

I know, I know, but does he mean it literally or figuratively?

Ah, you mean a figurative Buddha Hall.

If you read on, it tells you.

What does it say?

'This heap of flesh is each one of us. What is the treasure? The truth of the universe, the truth of the nature of the self.'

Right. So, 'the truth of the nature of the self' in each one of us goes into ...

The monastery gate is sometimes called 'The Triple Gate' which is the entrance into practice which in turn means doing Zazen then, isn't it?

So, it's all metaphorical? From what he is saying it seems to mean: Yunmen is saying there is a treasure hidden inside each one of us. This is our true self that is hanging up its lanterns in the hall of our Buddha nature; something like that? Does that sound nice?

I think it's literal and then the second line is saying, 'don't think about that at all; just look at this lantern shining on the monastery gates', saying 'don't dwell on it'.

Why does he say 'shattering all intellection and dualities. It cannot be discussed'? The heading of the article is just 'It Cannot Be Discussed'. Why does he say this last line cannot be discussed?

That's the Rinzai thing, isn't it? That's their approach to koans, that you can't discuss it. You can't have an intellectual discussion about it. They are way beyond words.

Right.

And I think that is why he is asking all these questions. The commentary doesn't explain anything; he is asking a load of questions.

Well, he is explaining what it is about for him.

Yes, but he is asking a load of questions. He isn't giving you any answers. ... (inaudible)... He is trying to make it almost sort of mystical, yes, it's 'beyond words'.

'Beyond words', 'cut away the complicated', 'are you willing to trust and enter the mystery'?

He gets more and more mystifying. I find I can make neither head nor tail of the commentary.

Well, we can make sense of it and it's interesting to hear different people reply. There are some people who say, 'yes, if we think of it metaphorically, we can make sense of it'. You know, inside each one of us there is some treasure. OK, our soul, our spiritual Buddha, and in the Buddha Hall of life and so on. So we can imagine, it's a metaphor for something very spiritual, can't we, if we try; I can. That something is ineffable and we can't pin it down; it's a mystery. So we can feel a sense of wonder, can't we, if we choose to think like that.

But I think it's all about direct experience. You experience it and you can say something about it like an equal. That's why it can't be discussed. It's not that it

doesn't exist but it's just direct experience and then you have this so-called - I call it - washing-up water afterwards.

Right, so it's about something we can't discuss.

We can discuss but maybe not describe it. We can't experience it by discussion.

Right. OK.

So, although he has written two pages of commentary; it can't be discussed, is that what he wants to say, because that's the title, isn't it?

One of the Zen masters - I don't know whether he was of the Rinzai lineage – said that we can't share direct experience (inaudible) ... with another person... (inaudible)

You can smell another person's fart though, can't you? (Laughter)

(inaudible)

Well, we should though, if that's direct experience.

He is not saying that none of it can be understood. He is saying the last sentence can't be understood.

All the other bit is an explanation; the last bit is real action, isn't it?

Yes.

To me the commentary almost sounds like it could be a way of trying to escape finding a meaning in the last sentence because to me the last sentence doesn't make sense. I could say it doesn't make sense because it cannot be described but I don't know if you can...

Yes.

It makes sense because it is real action and real action can't be described.

So it makes sense then, if it's real action? Ok.

I don't know how to translate this properly into English but Wittgenstein said that at some point: 'That which cannot be discussed about that you have to keep quiet...'

You should 'pass over in silence'.

I have read some mystics previously and a lot of them also talk about the mystery and that this cannot be understood and there are books about it. I mean – well, then, stop it. Wittgenstein makes more sense than these people.

He does, doesn't he?

Yumen seems to be caught by a kind of mystery, maybe his life or where he is at this moment. But then he is just lighting the lantern, he is just doing something concrete. So, although he is maybe caught by the mystery of this present moment, maybe he is wondering, 'what does it all mean?'. But then he is doing something practical and he is lighting the lanterns.

So, it's something practical.

Sounds like the same things as you and your birds this morning, you are doing something and then you see these birds and you have a nice feeling.

Oh yes. He is walking through the darkness and suddenly he can see the temple gate; so it looks as if the temple gate had been brought to the tip of lantern.

What about the first bit?

The treasure hidden in the heap of flesh is the thing that's happening; the shining at the top of his lantern.

I think with today's technology...obviously I can't interpret it the way it was written then, I can only interpret it now. When we look at the way that we age for example: our liver cells are replaced; basically we end up with a new liver every two years as an adult and a new skeleton every ten, for example, though some brain cells don't replace themselves at all. What I am saying is that this heap of flesh – we have this concept of what we are – is actually completely replacing itself the whole time while we are alive. But we experience reality through this heap of flesh.

Oh, sorry, I've changed from the person you were just talking to.

You have indeed; lanterns to me have something to do with illuminating something. So I assume it's a light. The temple gates are there but you can't see them until you throw some light on them and you wouldn't be able to see them at all were you not there with your heap of flesh.

Right.

That's the best I can do, Mike, sorry.

What do we think about the lantern dispersing darkness? What if it's the enlightenment which is illumination?

So, it is metaphorical?

Absolutely.

So you mean he is talking about something metaphorical.

Yes, I don't think (inaudible) ... has much to do with reality.

With reality?

No, it has several layers. The happening maybe real but (inaudible)

It seems to me to be a metaphor and concrete. The commentary is just kind of more or less mumbo-jumbo, coming from quite a confused person.

(Inaudible)

We all do Zazen here and I doubt that there is one of us who knows why we do it.

Oh, I don't agree with that.

I just know I won't ever stop doing it, but I don't know why.

You don't know that. (Laughter)

I don't know that, but I think that. But could anybody really discuss what they get from Zazen. Is it explainable?

That's what the Heart Sutra is about?

Perhaps that's what he means.

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.

That is what is talking about here.

Form is emptiness?

The 'heap of flesh', you know, and the emptiness is the life and he is bringing them together in one place to say, 'that's how you see things'. (Inaudible)... and you can't talk about them as distinct things although he goes on to try to by saying 'the spiritual light shines alone'. But actually, it doesn't; that's just one side. So it doesn't actually shine. But it seems to me that's what he is pointing to, the form and emptiness thing and then is saying 'How do you resolve that? There you go, you look at the whole don't you, you look at the gate ...

It's like that whole thing: If a limb breaks of a tree and there is no one there to hear it, would it make a sound? You know this whole philosophical thing, do you know what I mean? So, I think it is that sort of thing. If you're there, then you can experience the monastery gate with your lantern in the dark.

Right.

Eight hundred years ago some bloke held up a lantern and noticed that it lit the top of the monastery and since then there have been so many castles in the air put around that statement that he probably just is going in and noticed that the lamp lit the top of the monastery, at least on that occasion so that everything that has been spun around it since ...

Who shall we believe?

What's your take on it? Can you give us your take on it?

Ah, now, my take on it! (Laughter)

Does it make sense?

Yes, if I go to a monastery in Japan in the evening, it's very dark; so they hang lanterns around to light the place up. The old monk Yunmen is shuffling around with lanterns; he is going to hang lanterns in the Buddha Hall which is like this room, next to the Zazen Hall, hangs a couple of lanterns and then walks out to the temple gate which is on the outside of the temple and hangs a lantern up on the gate. While he is doing it, he feels the value of his action in the present moment because when we are doing something fully and we are not thinking about something else, we are just doing it, we can notice something very important. That very important something is our true self, our ability to act, the fact that we are actually doing something. It's the fact that we are actually doing something that holds us in the present moment, which is a kind of treasure.

The use of the word 'treasure' is a bit misleading, but it means 'something very important'. In Japanese they use the word 'treasure' to mean something that is important. For instance, you can say something like 'I've lost my treasure' meaning 'I lost my glasses'. So there is a word in Japanese which we translate as 'treasure' but we would never say 'treasure' in English, we would say 'something important' or 'something very valuable'. 'Heap of flesh' is just a way of people talking about themselves. 'This bag of skin' is another phrase; it comes up from Chinese stories. It's a kind of self deprecating way of talking about your body.

Because, from an objective point of view, what is my body? It's a kind of 'bag of skin full of water'. But this 'bag of skin full of water' is only a materialistic description of me. In it there is something very valuable and the 'something very valuable' that is in this 'bag of skin full of water' is what makes a real human being. So 'something very valuable inside a bag of skin full of water' is a description of a human being from two sides. We are not either 'a bag of skin' or 'something very valuable' but we are the two together.

When Master Yunmen is walking around hanging up lanterns, he notices that there is something very valuable in a bag of skin, in other words he notices that he's alive and acting. He goes into the Buddha Hall and hangs up the lantern and then he trots off through the darkness towards the temple gate which is across the gravel out there by the temple bell. And as he trots off in the darkness with the lantern on the top of his staff, the lantern starts to light up the temple gate as he gets nearer. As he trots across the gravel 'crunch, crunch, crunch' and the lantern lights up the temple gate, he sees the temple gate coming up towards his lantern and it comes up to the top of the stick as he hangs the lantern up. You can experience that if you go out in the dark with a torch tonight and you shine your torch around and walk towards something and everything else is pitch dark, the something comes towards you: common experience. What he is describing is just his everyday life. And in his everyday life there is something very important, not a metaphor for something else, not a description of some spiritual essence but just his life itself, just his simple life, hanging up a lantern and then marching up towards the temple gate which is coming up towards his lantern and he hangs it up.

Now, why should my description be any better than his, Daido Looi's? This is the question we have to decide. Do we want to take spiritual or mystical interpretations of Buddhist stories or do we want to take realistic interpretations which we search for in our own experience? And we have to choose, so you can choose.

Doing Zazen informs that choice though, doesn't it?

Why?

Because in your own experience of practising Zazen, of experiencing your own life, the world becomes perhaps more sharply defined in the light of practising Zazen. So you have experiences like Master Yunmen's which are just ordinary but at the same time you can see something special...

In the ordinary?

Yes.

Something 'sacred' in the ordinary?

I don't know about sacred but very nice anyway.

Well, it's a treasure.

(Inaudible) ...That's what he is doing, going on to talk about something else altogether, more mystical and so on. He isn't just saying 'Oh, look, how ordinary and amazing ... and it's just here. John Daido is going on to talk about all sorts of other things, you know, the Dharmakaya and... (Inaudible) and so on... Maybe he is just trying to say the same thing but he is doing it in a very kind of 'up there' sort of way, isn't he?

So what determines which way we take in trying to understand stories like this or Buddhist teachings of any kind? What determines it?

If you are the kind of person who for whatever reason is attracted to Rinzai Buddhism you are going to end up doing the kind of Zazen which they taught you which encourages you to look at these questions in that way.

Can you describe something without saying 'people attracted to Rinzai Buddhism'?

It was the fundamental thing that I was saying.

Oh, I see.

Well, when you were saying 'why would you do that?'

You are either the sort of person that tests things by some real experience or you are somebody who is prepared to think about things that can only exist in your mind.

Is this the Robert Percy question?

(Inaudible)

It could be. There is some difference, isn't there? I would guess that it's not whether you are attracted to Rinzai Buddhism or Soto Buddhism or Christianity or Islam. It's something to do with where you look for reality...

Meaning...

...or truth or meaning.

What I was implying or perhaps this is just circular 'Why would you look?' 'Well, because of the kind of person you are. (Inaudible).

Where we look for our truth can determine how we understand teachings and what teachings we prefer and what teachings we look for and follow and everything. So there is something that predates whatever teachings we listen to and that is whether we prefer to look for reality in the mystery of the universe or in the spiritual world, or whether we prefer to look for it in the physical world, for instance, in science alone or somewhere else. Is there somewhere else? We can look for our own truth certainly in the spiritual world because we have got many examples of that over thousands of years in Europe. We can look for reality in the physical world because science is so well developed. We can understand in laymen's terms what science is trying to do and where they are trying to look for it. But where else can we look for reality?

...(Inaudible)... reality in art, in literature, in music, in painting? My sense of this commentary is that it's just like bad poetry. This is my own response to it that it's complete crap.

(Inaudible). He is very consciously recreating the 'Blue Cliff Record'. That started off as a very urgent commentary.

Explain what the 'Blue Cliff Record' is.

It's a koan collection that is very popular with the Rinzai people. But it's in a particular style. So it's always this, 'you must swallow the red hot ball of doubt and vomit it out' - kind of...it's got a particular kind of urgency and style to it. And I think what Malcolm was talking about, about personalities, I think, that's true. When I was at the Blue Mountain monastery, the emotional tone of the place was quite urgent, quite crisp, quite driven – it's just who that appeals to. They liked to be up at three in the morning doing Zazen, doing Zazen till ten o'clock at night. It's a particular type of personality. It's not my personality.

But it's interesting, isn't it, because if you look at the tone of this conversation, the direction of this conversation for the last hour, it's that our reality is defined by the people who are influencing us around us, so that the interpretations and the guesses and the hypotheses fundamentally change when you come in with your particular approach.

Yes.

And I find it fascinating to see how actually completely malleable human beings are. So it's crisp when it's crisp when we are around people at three o'clock in the morning and it's something else when we are with Mike.

I sit up here behind the little table and I wait till last ...

And you knock us all out!

I prearranged with Andrew to ask what my take was... (chuckles) – No, I didn't actually.

...how much our reality isn't defined by us. It's defined by what's around us.

The majority is suffering. Well, religion is primarily based on suffering or the relief of suffering. Be religious and you will go to heaven...(inaudible)

The personality thing, something like that, though you say it a lot better. The truth can't be determined by these guys just investigating it from a particular pint of view which is fundamentally flawed so that...(inaudible) Whatever you individually get from it, if it works for you, then it works in that way that it works for you. That's all you can ever say about that really. It doesn't really work for me; what you say works for me.

(Inaudible)

Should we not say that they are wrong?

I don't like saying that they are wrong.

One of my friends once said that there are an infinite number of parallel ways to God and I think that sums it up.

And - there may be an infinite number of Gods to go with those parallel ways.

I don't think she meant God in a Christian sense. She meant the Absolute.

The Absolute?

(Inaudible)

Does that mean that she knows what the absolute is and looking back from the absolute she can see that all these eighty-four thousand ways lead to the same point or does it mean she hopes that they do?

No, I think, that somehow temperamentally we choose different ways but they lead to the same, if you like, point.

To the same point, hopefully?

Yes, hopefully.

It's a nice hope, isn't it? And there's lots of effort being put in these days to unify lots of different religions. For instance, I get a little booklet a couple of times a year from the universities in Bristol where they have an 'inter-faith project'. And the inter-faith project wants to encourage meetings and seminars between all the faiths into which Buddhism is included, to unify everything...No, not unify everything, rather to find something in common.

That's better.

You once said that Zazen, our Buddhist way, is not the only way to attain the truth, how to experience the truth, that there are many different ways; but it doesn't mean that we cannot criticise or correct something that we consider is wrong or a misinterpretation. So, we can criticise this teacher's interpretation but it doesn't mean that there aren't different ways of how to experience the truth. You recognise that there are different ways to understand the truth but at the same time we want to criticise or work on something within Buddhism that should be understood. So, you are not saying that we are doing things in the only way that is correct, right? I am just checking because I think some people might misinterpret your attitude as saying that we are the only people who are right, that only we can obtain the truth and only we know how to do it. But that's not your attitude?

No.

Just to stress.

Yes. What I really wanted to do was using this story to point out how we are influenced by different interpretations, but how the interpretations are influenced by our own preferences, if you like.

Could I add something to that?

Yes.

What I have learnt from you just now is that I tend to go towards metaphor and the big picture to try and understand things. When I was looking at this, I was thinking, "I wonder what the 'monastery gate' means in thirteenth century China? I need to have that historical context to understand this". But what I learnt in the way you interpreted this is that if I think about myself in this context, what the reality of my experience in acting this would be and that is another way to understand it.

Yes, exactly.

For me reading the commentary, by kind of 'mystifying' it, gives the impression that there is teacher that has got the answer and that I haven't and it's kind of a hierarchical position.

I agree; I feel that too.

Don't you see?

Yes, but am I not setting up a hierarchy by giving you my answer and because I am sitting here?

Your answer is not his answer. I was just thinking it's almost like a multiple choice question; but in his case if it is a mystery, every answer is correct.

Yes, wouldn't it be nice if every answer was correct.

(Inaudible)... immediately whether I really know or I don't. It may not be exactly what you have in your little book as the answer for you. That makes it much more interesting and makes it real for me.

There is a strong trend within religious circles that is referred to as the Dumassillian(?) approach which was I think started in the nineteenth century by a guy called George Dumassil(?). His idea was to find the unifying aspects of all religions, that there was some kind of true core that all religions belonged to. From my perspective this way of looking at it has become very popular with New Age and those sorts of books that want to be synthesising all these different things very superficially. Personally, I don't know, but I can't stand the stuff. But depending on how you look at it, you can choose to find all the things that are the same, bring those together, and then have some kind of very satisfied feeling that there is some underlying core that brings is all together. But with regard to your earlier question, 'Is it ok to criticise, to make comments to other people?' as a pragmatist my answer is: I think very much so because debate is useful. If you have a strong view and understanding and somebody says something completely different I think it's stupid not to respectfully take a bit of the conversation and see if we can learn something both of us, rather than stressing the bits that we all can agree on which leaves us just with the most – how would you say in English – in Swedish we say 'toothless', the weakest, most diluted, boring stuff with all the good stuff off the table.

Ah, yes. (Chuckles).

It's a bit of marketing, isn't it? They're trying to get the Christians to buy this book and trying to get everybody to buy this book because it's the common thing...but the difference is that the common thing with most religions is this 'hope' aspect rather than the 'present moment'. Does that make sense?

I'd say that's the difference ... your explanation is much more concrete.

You know why?

You've been to a temple.

Yes - In the dark. And for me that's the only thing that counts, i.e. direct experience. None of us ever believe anything unless we experience it. We hear it, we listen to it but we don't really take it in unless we experience it.

Your explanation is based on something we could do as well; we could go to a temple, all of us if we have the cash to go to Japan, we can go to a temple and see that happening. But much of what's written in this article, an awful lot of people have no means of penetrating by themselves.

So he very kindly gave them a way to understand it.

There is an awful lot of stuff which has been collected from all sorts of places and we have to take on trust which is not the same.

I don't think you can have a fair assessment. I'm going to stick up for the underdog. It depends on your assessment of what Rinzai is all about. I've read a couple of books and the whole thing as John was saying, is about having to swallow this iron ball of doubt and to descend into a complete frenzy of self-doubt at your own intellectual processes of the ideas you have about the world and suddenly you get this kind of breakthrough. And I am sure for a lot of people that has an effect and they might end up at a very similar place that we are talking about, this kind of direct experience. Because of their personality they are attracted to something...(inaudible)

There is a book that somebody has written recently about how after a shock or crisis people are sort of more malleable. So, is it just another way of controlling people? You lead them down this kind of way?

So breakthrough or breakdown?

The Rinzai process disempowers people.

Speak up, Barbara. Barbara has been to many Rinzai places.

I am just thinking that one of the circles in this conversation...we are talking about direct experience, why do you read this book? Throw it away. Go and experience it and then you will see what it is.

Haven't got the time.

Well, you have chosen something else but don't deride people who do that...

I was just sticking up for it.

(Inaudible)

No, I think you misunderstood me. I was sticking up for the Rinzai then. I was saying 'I doesn't matter how you get there, if it's meaningful to you...'

(Inaudible)

We are talking about this text.

He is a Rinzai priest.

No, he is not. He is a Soto priest. Oh, he is both, sorry.

Let me say one more thing. If you come to the lecture at the university and the teacher shows you lots of equations and you haven't done maths before you are completely lost, i.e. it will be completely daunting for you. If you haven't reached a certain stage of spiritual development – I use this expression for want of something better – that will mean nothing to you as well.

Yes.

I find if I go to books, some things make no sense to me. But three years later I go back and I see something more. This is incremental development, if you like.

You have to experience it.

Yes, experience but it's also that the commentary always stems from the teacher's own experience. It cannot stem from anything else and it may also mean that it may not be transferable, in the sense that I can go to ten lectures and only one teacher will sort of speak to me in a way that I can understand. That's why we have this difficulty because we have teachers expounding as well as they can and students trying to understand as well as they can.

Well, that's a nice description of something I have never been to, which is people who are talking in a very different way.

But leading on from this morning what I'd like to say is that the kind of teaching that I am trying to do and would like to continue doing is really completely different from that. You don't need mathematics to understand what I am trying to say. You might not understand what I am trying to say because I don't express it very well but it doesn't need any level of spiritual attainment; it only needs you to look in the right place to understand it and that place is not away from here. And I think this to me is the essence of Dogen's teachings. The place where you should look to understand what he is saying is right here, right here in our own experience and in our own lives and for me if you look anywhere else then it is something else and I'm not interested in that. And I think that in itself, that attitude is a kind of revolution, a very small and possibly unsuccessful revolution but I would like to continue with it because I think as you can see with this koan we can have very many different interpretations going off in many different directions but if we have experience and if we imagine ourselves in the situation then there is a simple explanation where the story makes complete sense.

The only point I was trying to make is the fact that there is a simple explanation and it appeals to us here, generally. That doesn't necessarily mean that it is the only way you can use that story. Because I think these guys know that that's probably the simple explanation but the Rinzai tradition is very different, isn't it?

Sorry, which was the point you were trying to make?

It's different, but it's not wrong and it's not right. All these things are different but none of them are right or wrong.

I think that attitude is completely wrong. (Laughter)

This reminds me of Brad Warner talking about this guy who was selling enlightenment for fifty-thousand dollars. If I cannot criticise this unless I have gone there and paid the fifty-thousand dollars myself, it becomes very complicated.

Plus, I think it is necessary to fight for what we think is right.

Yeah, for what we do.

I don't mean in the sense of right and wrong but in the sense of what describes something real for us.

For us?

No, other people can do what they like.

That's my only point.

...but it doesn't mean that we shouldn't fight for it or speak up for it, does it?

This is coming back to the point you were making earlier about a crisis in Buddhism and that is not just a crisis in Buddhism. It is a crisis in the world. This approach arguably gives us a tool to support a change away from that crisis...

Well, it's a world revolution. Oh, yes!

If we can understand and articulate in a simpler way, it becomes more accessible and people benefit.

You don't need to come to my monastery and learn for ten years before you understand; you don't need to come to my lectures and read lots of books before you can understand. You can understand with whatever you've got now – is the attitude.

Hasn't that always been the message of Soto Zen?

Maybe yes, but I am not a member of Soto Zen. Although I follow Dogen, I am not a member of Soto Zen.

I can never remember the title of books I have read but I have read the story where Zen split from Rinzai because the farmer's boy understood the message in a clear way and the monastery leader recognised this.

Master Daikan Eno.

And he had to hide him away because the jealous monks were trying to kill him or something but he was just a farm boy. He could hardly write but he understood the message...

...simply...

...and was able to voice it...

Yes, that's a good example.

So that's an idea that's being going on for a long time...

(Bell rings).

Why is it when I am talking that the bell always goes? (Laughter)

It was prearranged between us.

Yes, it is a good example, the story of Master Daikan Eno. Maybe we can talk about it some other time. Yes, it's true; but I don't think that is 'Soto-Zen' as such, rather it is a line of teachings which prefer to look at reality in our own experience rather than looking for it somewhere else. Somebody who is fairly straightforward sometimes can see what's in front them better than somebody who is very intelligent and intellectual who can think about things a lot and tie themselves up in knots. Sometimes, yes.

So it can be discussed?

We just discussed it, didn't we?

Thank you very much.