

Yunmen's 'Jewel'

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Shuso Hossen, Grail House

ATTENTION! Book of Serenity, Case No. 92, "Yunmen's Jewel"

CASE

Great Master Yunmen said, "Within heaven and earth, in space and time, there is a jewel, hidden in the mountain of form, holding up the lamp, heading into the Buddha shrine, bringing the triple gate on the lamp."

VERSE

Whipping up excess concerns, he dislikes fanciness in things.
 Returning, where is life?
 To the woodcutter with the rotten axe handle it seems there is no road;
 Mr Pot in the cassia tree cleverly has a home.
 On the golden waves of the night water floats the reflection of the moon;
 The autumn wind and arrays of clouds surround the reed flowers.
 The cold fish on the bottom don't eat the bait;
 The party ended, a clear song turns the raft around.

I think I have just had the best month I have ever had in my life—at least so far! This has been a superlative, an extraordinary splendiferous circus of beings manifesting themselves, Buddhas becoming Buddhas, Dharma surging forth its ten thousand forms, and Sangha, community, truly being Sangha. I have never had such an intensive experience of both love and learning, such consistent caring and support. To all of you here, to all those who have spent days and weeks here this month, most especially to Roshi and the teachers, the Tokyu and Fugan who prepared great food every day, Fugan who got up with me to do the rounds at 4 a.m., Koshin and Chodo who managed not only to be excellent teachers, but always to bring a sense of humor to it, and countless others who imbued this house, this hill, and this town with a genuine spiritual and human presence.....my deepest gratitude and joy!

As all of you know, it is very difficult to afford the time to be here—hard enough for a week, much harder for a month. The United Church of Rockville Centre on Long Island, where I serve, has made that possible. We are very happy to have a Zen affiliate at the church, and three people are here today who are regular "sitters". Ming is a regular at our 6:30 a.m. sit on Mondays; Brigitte is already at work by that time, so she comes at the 6 p.m. sit. Pepper is director of a day care center and works night and day, so she comes to the Saturday morning sits and discussions. I am particularly indebted to Brigitte, because she takes care of my dogs while I'm here....and Anraku understands the value of that!

I would like to dedicate this talk to two people: the first is Mickey Schnauffer. You may recall her name being mentioned in the memorial dedication all this week. Mickey was a member of the church. She was in her late 70's and was expecting to

move into an assisted living situation. But last week she fell down her stairs, hitting her head and causing massive bleeding. She never recovered. Those of you in the writing workshop will remember I wrote about her and her vivid personality. A straight shooter, you might say, who always let you know what she thought.

The second person I dedicate this talk to is my grandson, Isaac. Isaac will turn 15 next week. At this particular point in time, we don't know where he is. He is somewhere in the Los Angeles/San Diego area.

For both Mickey and Isaac, as well as all of us, I pray, May all beings find their true home. Finding our true home is in fact what our entire practice of Zen is about. To aid in our search, let's look at today's case. [read Case]

What is the jewel, "within heaven and earth, in space and time, that is hidden in the mountain of form" holding up the lamp, heading into the Buddha shrine, bringing the triple gate on the lamp?

Let's cut to the chase: the jewel is me, myself, "I" and this self that is the Self of all things, the entire universe. This jewel of myself is hidden in the mountain of form, hidden, that is, within this body. Who I essentially am is hidden to myself, I am a mystery to myself. Myself as a jewel is not my conscious intention, not what I know of myself, not my estimate of what I can do or cannot do. The jewel is an unknown, un-pinpointable essence. To say it is my soul doesn't really help much, though sometimes that's what was perhaps meant.

We are a mystery to ourselves. For example, Tokyu and several others of us have been playing the piano this month; Ryuko has been playing shakuhachi; Fugan and Keisei have been playing drums; I know we have Yushin and other musicians in our sangha also. When we make music, who makes the music? Who does the playing? I know for myself, as soon as I think about it, I make mistakes, get lost. We get into a certain state of mind, and we forget about ourselves and there is only the music. Myko throws pots. The same thing can happen with washing dishes or gardening.....When we are completely absorbed in what we are doing, who is doing the doing? It is the jewel manifesting itself.

With his usual poetic genius, Dogen puts it this way: it is suspended in emptiness, hidden in the lining of clothes, found under the chin of dragons, and in the headdresses of kings. The pearl is always inside our clothing (that is, inside of us, our real nature) (Dogen, OBP)

It is, however, hidden in this mountain of form. It is something that has to be identified, cultivated, evoked, brought forth. If we fail to bring forth this core of our being, we betray ourselves and betray others we might have helped. The idea of our having a powerful creative essence, intrinsic to each one of us, a power which we can choose to cultivate or choose to ignore, however, is not just a Buddhist idea.

Moses, giving last words to the people he led out of slavery in Egypt, just as they were about to enter the promised land that he himself would never see, said,

¹²It is not in heaven, that thou should say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

¹³Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou should say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

¹⁴But the word is very near you, it is in your mouth, and in your heart, that thou can do it. Therefore choose life, that you may live.....

Jesus said, A man found a treasure hidden in a field, and went and bought the whole field so he could have it. Jesus also said, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant who comes across a pearl of great price and he goes and sells all the he has in order to buy the pearl. Further, he said, the kingdom of heaven is within you.

Soren Kierkegaard, the 19th century Danish philosopher, described that core consciousness as the self, and warned how easily it can be neglected and what a loss it is if it is never realized:

“A man may be quite well known and regarded in the community. Be a mayor, own a bank and enjoy the respect of the community, but be lacking a self. The self is the one thing whose lack people are unlikely to notice and about which they are least likely to inquire. A man may lose a wife, a dog, \$5, or a house, and everyone is sure to notice. But the fact that he lacks a self may go completely unnoticed.”

According to analytical psychologist, Carl Jung, if we fail to listen and follow our core sense of self, on the path of individuation, we may well become sick.

Last week Joshin introduced us to the Proprioceptive way of Writing developed by Toby Simon and Linda Metcalf. Toby takes the cake, in my mind, for the shortest, most pithy statement about the jewel hidden in the mountain of form: Toby says simply “We were poets before we were not.” [repeat]

Have we reclaimed the poets that we were before we were not? Why is it so damned difficult to find ourselves, much less be ourselves?

To answer, the koan has this verse:

Wrapping up excess concerns, he dislikes fanciness in things.

Returning, where is life? Here we are having spent a week, a few days or a month learning to leave behind excess concerns, to leave behind the unessential and focus on the essential. We have practiced letting go in zazen, letting go in

our bumping into each other grating on each others' nerves, letting go even of our sense of how things ought to go if only they would listen to me. We have reduced the fanciness in our lives for the time here. Today, we return to what we call normal life. Returning, where is life? Where is the life in the life we have as we head home? What is the essential?

To the woodcutter with the rotten axe handle, it seems there is no road. The reference is to a woodcutter who gets so absorbed in a chess game that he stays playing chess so long his axe handle rots. All his energy and attention are on the game. He does not see the life all around him. He has forgotten who he is. If he were Bobby Fischer, it would be understandable, but he has forgotten what his main task in life is, what he is really supposed to be doing, and thus he has entirely lost his way. This was in the 10th century, before television, cellphones and MP3s, Wii and Gameboy.

What's your favorite game? Quite some time ago, Eric Berne analyzed the games people play. The titles are pretty self-explanatory: If It Weren't For You; Let's You and Him Fight; Kick Me; Now I've Got You You SOB; See What You Made Me Do; Look How Hard I've Tried; Ain't it awful; Why don't you, yes, but...; Stupid; Wooden Leg; Kick Me. Berne said such games give us a way of structuring our time, create interactions, but give us a predictable, negative payoff that confirms our basic beliefs about ourselves and others. The only alternative to doing the same ol thing to get the same ol results is to take the risk of honesty and openness, and let intimacy evolve--- within yourself and in your relations with others. Intimacy is living in freedom, openness, honesty and vulnerability. As long as you're playing games in this sense, you are avoiding who you really are, what your genuine gifts are. Perhaps the woodcutter was convinced that he was just enjoying chess. But there was this rotting axe handle....

Mr Pot in the cassia tree cleverly has a home. This refers to a man who basically builds a home in a tree. It is a beautiful home, adorned inside with the finest furnishings, an extensive library of books and dvds, with fascinating art. Quite clever, and quite self-enclosed; just not "related" we might say, not "grounded in the world that is shared with everyone else. In suburbs people talk about neighborhoods, and usually refer to those that are okay versus those that are not.... In the city it's about apartments and who can afford to live where...and the unasked question is who is our neighbor if we don't know who they are, and what about the rest of the world. "Our house is a very very very fine house...." Where do we live, and why? Where do we not live, and why not? You don't have to live in a gated community to live in a rather small, protected world.

Then these three lives remind us of the inevitable march of time:

On the golden waves of the nightwater floats the reflection of the moon;

The autumn wind and arrays of clouds surround the reed flowers.

The cold fish on the bottom don't eat the bait.

The golden waves of nightwater reflecting the moon in summer. Autumn wind. Cold winter. From summer to autumn to winter. The shifts happen oh so quickly and then....the party's over. What then?

Regardless of your age, regardless of which season of life you are in, has the fact of death's inevitability hit home to you yet, enough to begin to leak some of the joy out of old ways of pleasure and avoidance? What song do you need to hear to turn your life around?

Returning, where is life? Where is your life?

Which brings us back to the original case: You are the jewel hidden in the mountain of form. You are the one carrying the lamp, headed into the Buddha shrine. The Buddha shrine is not only the zendo where you practice, but the entire universe where you live, work, play, make decisions, suffer, age, get sick and die. Once you've got certain things settled, moved beyond life based on the maximizing of pleasure and avoidance of pain, beyond status seeking and finding the perfect relationship, then you let go of certain things; things that used to give you pleasure no longer interest you, and you turn your life in the direction of saving all sentient beings, because that is finally all that matters. And you begin with yourself, and you never stop because you are the jewel, this infinitely precious piece of the universe. And by your life, and by your practice, you carry the triple gate on your lamp: you yourself hold up the Buddha Dharma and Sangha. It is your responsibility, your privilege and your joy.

May your life go well. Thank you for your practice.

THERE IS A VERSE ABOUT THIS CASE AND I HAVE ASKED KAIKU TO READ IT