

# BOUNDLESS WAY ZEN

## Dharma talks, sermons and teishos

### **BUDDHA NATURE THE BLACK STONE**

Sesshin Teisho by John Tarrant Roshi  
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Camp Meeker, California

Buddha nature is like this. It's like a black stone. It's at the center of the universe. Everywhere you turn, there is the center. The tree is that stone. The person is that stone. The bird is that stone. The sky is that stone. Emptiness is that stone. Wherever you turn, even if you try to get away from it, there it is your Buddha nature.

At this time in sesshin it's very important to attend. Now we're digging in and going deep. Do your best to sit still and have the mind just be clear all by itself. If your mind is clear, then everything that appears is clear before it. Everything is buddha. If your mind is cloudy, then everything is separate and distant and alienated, and you're either paranoid or obsessed, usually. So, it's much easier if the mind is clear, then things just rise naturally and fall away when their time has come to die.

Please sit comfortably.

Sesshin is a great chance. It's a great opportunity. We work so much of our lives just maintaining the structures of life, the necessary forms of life, going through the ordinariness and simplicity of life. That is very good and necessary. Then, out of that, we get this precious time that we can put aside just for the sake of our true work.

There is a famous Soto temple, one of the head Soto temples in Japan, which has a writing over the front as you walk in saying, 'Do not enter here unless you care about life and death.' Do not even walk in the door. Sesshin is like that. It is a time we have put aside to be one with our true nature. I think it's very important to respect that. I very much respect you for having done this. This is a great thing to do this. Now we then have to honor what we have done and do it all the way through so that we do not just think it's enough to get here and then collapse. We have to walk all the way through, and that's not so hard to do. We need confidence in our own true nature that it will hold us up in the most difficult circumstances.

If you will reflect for a moment, you will find that sesshin is exactly like life in this way. That one thing you know you'll do is die. Yesterday, I talked about death and the deaths of people some of you know, but what about your own death? One of my early teachers was a Tibetan lama who was very fond of making Westerners meditate on their own deaths. When we complained, he would have us meditate for a week longer on the topic. That was all you could do two weeks of meditation on death. There is something very freeing when you are free of fear of your own death, that is a good place to begin because to do anything fully in life, we must be free, and we must be free of fear. That fear rises around us like a marsh mist at night with its chill and grips us and makes the heart uneasy; makes the heart quail.

If you can find your center and your core, if you can find that black stone at the core of the universe, that buddha nature, then you will not be afraid even if you are dying. And, if you are not afraid even when you are dying, then you are not afraid to live, and this is the whole point of zen. We must jump out into life and then the most ordinary things of life blaze with their purity and beauty a cup of tea, a bird singing in the morning, a child's laughter. Then we see that truly the buddha nature is in the child's laughter and the cup of tea. Buddha nature is in even the aches in your own knees. If you're sitting and uncomfortable, bless even the discomfort. It, too, is life; it, too, is buddha nature. If you're sitting and have sorrows, bless even the sorrows and you'll find that they, too, shine and have buddha nature. Everything that we have lost will return to us. Everything that we hoped for is already here,

so there is nowhere we need to go. Fortunately, we have companions. This room is full of sincere people struggling away, sweating in the summer heat.

We have to become one with the heat, become one with the moment. Each moment of pure zazen that you do lifts everyone else in the dojo. We hold each other and help each other in that way. You may not believe this, but it is true that your zazen helps everybody else. This is true for leaders, too. Experienced leaders know that if they're worried about how the dojo's doing, if their own zazen improves, the dojo will improve. The same for teachers. Who knows? Perhaps the same for Shakyamuni who is still doing zazen so he can hold us up.

If we are not afraid of the many forms of life, of death, of the coming and going of buddha nature, then we can enter each moment and be free. We realize that what seems solid is always changing, what seems like place is also time, what seems like time is also a place in the universe. We are always moving in and out of the shapes and the time, and we are always free. If we don't get stuck, we are free.

The early stages of zazen are always about getting stuck. It's like picking tentacles off. The octopus has got you and you have to take the tentacles off one sucker at a time and by the time you've gotten one tentacle off you find three more have gone on you on the other arm. You get angry and you let go of the anger. You find sorrow or agitation there and you let go of the sorrow and agitation and you find three other things have arrived. When you're in that place, it's important just to be patient, to be in that place, to bless even that place of difficulty, and then you'll find all by itself it will open. And again, the black stone is there. If you really look at the buddha nature, that stone contains everything - the light, the flowers, day and night, the sun and the moon.

There's nothing else to say, really, here. Wherever you find a gap between yourself and this buddha nature, just let yourself fall through that gap, just cross it, find some way to cross it. The old image is long for it with the same fierceness and resolution that you would use if your hair were on fire; with the same fierceness and resolution you would use if you saw your child sinking under the water. Jump into the zazen that way for you are rescuing something when you do. If you want to heal the world, which sorely needs healing, here is the place to begin. If you can heal your heart, you will gather other people. This healing will spread. Someone else's heart will be gathered as well. Whatever comes just welcome it and bless it, be true to it and be sincere with it. In that way we'll all progress together on the Buddha's path, and our enlightenment will deepen and go on and on and on, and have consequences we cannot guess.

Please sit sweetly and fiercely, yes.