RIDING THE DRAGON 2 : THE KITCHEN SINK

Part 1 : Stop Making Sense

Good evening bodhisattvas.

I'll start with a few kind of movie trailers, in the form of some more pretend talk titles, since dharma talks don't really have titles; and also a few epigraphs, also pretend, since dharma talks don't really have those either.

And then I want to talk about a couple different things tonight. Partly I'll repeat and amplify some of what I said last night. I hope that's okay.

Some possible pretend talk titles. One: Some practical, how-to tips for riding a dragon in retreat. Two, catch a wave. Three, it's as easy as falling off a log, but how do I do that, please? Four: in praise of fuzzy thinking (and fuzzy being). Five, just to date myself: stop making sense, with a nod to David Byrne and Talking Heads. And here's a couple epigraphs. One, from the *Gateless Gateway*, Case 20; the first time I heard it was the first time I heard Sarah speak into the hall as Head of Practice in an early Pacific Zen School Retreat, in maybe 1998 or '99. The case asks "Why can't a person of great strength lift up their leg?" And Wuman's poem says, and this is what Sarah said, "There's no place to put my whole body." Or in Shibayama's translation, "There is no place to put this gigantic body." Or another translation, "Your body is so vast there is nowhere to put it." Pretend epigraph two: something the great 17th-18th century Soto teacher Tenkei says a few times in his commentary to the cases in the *Blue Cliff Record*: "I throw it over to the other side. What other side? Other side of what?" And third and last, I'll just repeat the poem by Muso Soseki that Andrew read this morning. It makes that connection between water and dragon that I'm interested in. And it's a really beautiful poem. It's called "Old Creek":

Since before anyone remembers
    it's been clear
        shining like silver
Though the moonlight suffuses it
    and the wind ruffles it
        no trace of either remains
Now I wouldn't dare
    to explain the secret
        of the stream bed
but I can tell you
    that the blue dragon
        is coiled there

Ok, here's the actual dharma talk. The first part is more or less about the limits and pitfalls of what we call "clear thinking." So, you know, in praise of fuzzy thinking, and stop making sense.

Clear thinking goes about its business by making sharp distinctions and boundaries, and it helps us get things done, it helps us get a handle on what we can get a handle on. But some things are just too big to confine within clear limits, and too protean, metamorphic, and mysterious to render in clear concepts. And too powerful: they burst the bounds in which we'd like to confine them; we

can't "handle" them. Take dragons for instance. To summon them up, as in Chinese legend and mythology, gives "a local habitation and a name" to some thing, or non-thing, that exceeds and eludes even their mythic proportions. But dragons image and help us imagine this nameless power. Here's the David Hinton passage I read last night, from his I Ching: "Primal emptiness separated into heaven and earth. That's how it all began. Before long, a pair of dragons emerged from Bright Prosperity Mountain. Root Breath and Lady Shi Voice. Now, dragons in ancient China embodied the awesome force of change. A dragon was in constant transformation, writhing through all creation and all destruction, shaping itself into the 10,000 things, tumbling through their ceaseless transformations."

So how could we not be riding it, this boundless, omnipresent force? But a lot of the time we don't realize that, or we don't acknowledge it. And then a lot of times we're like Melville's Bartleby, "I would prefer not to." So it's worth pointing out that, despite or maybe because of their tremendous power, dragons, in Chinese legend and mythology, are mostly not malevolent. They're often really benevolent, as Andrew suggested via the mythic stories he told this morning. On the whole the tradition wants to teach us to give our selves up to this inescapable, inhuman force, to cooperate with rather than resist it. That's the spirit that animates another passage by Hinton, from the introduction to his I Ching translation again, on "return." He notes that the Tao De Jing describes the way's most fundamental movement as return. His translation says: "Return is the movement of the way, and the 10,000 things arise, and in them I watch the return, all things on and ever on, each returning to its root." Hinton comments: "Return is also spoken of as an essential in the I Ching, where there was a hexagram dedicated to it, 24 return." The elaborations on this hexagram say, in Hinton's translation: "All return penetrating everywhere, things emerge and die back. And in return itself, you can see the very heart-mind of all heaven and earth." Hinton comments: "The 10,000 things emerge from and return to a root or source, from which they reappear in a new form."

And we're to give ourselves over to this process, and learn to feel the rightness of it. Even if it's daunting, and we often feel daunted. I'm reminded again of that wonderfully wry line in the John Ashbery poem, reporting a contrary bit of advice that the speaker knows, ruefully, won't work: "Better, you said, to stay cowering like this in the early lessons." True confession: that's a feeling I sometimes have in retreat—and outside retreat. You know, let's stay in the grade school version of being a person, not go out into dragon land. Except, of course, it's already dragon land right where we are, even in grade school.

So I'm going to come back now to a case that Andrew mentioned, *Blue Cliff Record* 2. The evocation of the dragon there is, well, sobering? chastening? daunting? terrifying? bracing? liberating? imbued with a courageous sense of affirmation? Maybe all of those. I'm going to emphasize aspects of this dragon image that are different from the ones Andrew did, which is part of the pleasure of keeping company with the koans together in Open Source, that we get to do that. There isn't just one way to hear it or one place to take it.

Here's from Xuedo's poem on the case. It's at least a little scary, and it links to the main case in a somewhat surprising way, as we'll see. Here's Xuedo's image: "When the skull's consciousness is exhausted, how can joy remain? / In a dead tree the dragon murmurs are not yet exhausted. / Difficult, difficult."

The extended commentary on this image hardly stays cowering in the early lessons. On the whole, it seems to celebrate, with courage and a fiercely open heart, these eerie and daunting dragon

energies, and the process they embody of return or dying back, the rising and falling, weaving and unweaving of each individual "form," each living being. So Yuanwu in his interlinear comment on the poem says, he's kind of grouchy and brave at once here, "Bah! The dead tree blooms again. Bodhidharma travels through the eastern land." That's fierce affirmation. And then, as Andrew quoted from further on in the case, when someone asks, "'What are dragon murmurings in a dead tree?' Shishuang answers, 'Still having joy.'" That's good, no? But what's the price of this joy? What does it ask or require of us?

That's made pretty clear in another part of the commentary on the case. A student asked about these dragon murmurings, "'Who can hear this?' Shishuang said, 'In the whole world there is no one who does not hear it.' The student asked, 'What book is dragon murmurings taken from?' Shishuang said, 'I don't know what book it's from, but all who hear it die.'" Talkabout fierce affirmation! Shishuang implicitly asks something of the student here, actually he asks a lot. I think this moment takes up Zhaozhou's question to a different student, in the main case: "can you live like that?" We'll get back to Zhaozhou in a moment. But Shishaung: "All who hear it die." He invites his diligent student to allow that in, right here and now. All who hear it die; can you live like that? Poor dutiful student, lucky student: asking his diligent, scholarly question--"What book is dragon murmurings taken from?"--requesting the source or the footnote, please teacher, where's that citation from? As if getting an "A" in this course, as if clear thinking, might exempt him from what he already senses is being asked of him. "I'm being such a good zen student, I'm certainly not expressing a personal concern, I just want to get clear about the meaning of this phrase and the meaning of the dharma. Then I'll have a handle on it, and I'll be good."

If that impulse to get clear, to be scholarly about such a startling image, seems kind of outlandish here, and also sad and tender, which I think it does, it actually takes us right back to the interaction in the main case and casts a pretty drastic light on it. The main case also calls into question our desire for reassuring clarity, suggesting we need to relinquish that wish or demand, giving ourselves up to dragon energies instead. Stop making sense. You can spend your whole life trying to "get clear" and get a handle on it, you can study the whole book that contains the passage about dragon murmurings in a withered tree, that's great, but if you think that will earn you a get out of jail free card, think again: here's something inescapable. Ready or not, here we come. Or there we go. Clear or not.

Here's the case. At least at first, it doesn't sound so drastic; no dragons to be seen. It starts this way: Zhaozhou taught, "'The greatest way isn't difficult if you don't pick and choose.' As soon as I speak, you'll think that's picking and choosing, or that's clear." And then he says something surprising: "But I don't identify with clarity. Can you live like that?" A student asks, "If you don't identify with clarity, what do you live by?" And Zhaozhou says, "I don't know." That's a little disconcerting, coming from a renowned teacher. Has the great Zhaozhou lost his bearings? He doesn't seem unhinged, but he does sound unmoored. This doesn't seem to make the student happy. And he can't leave it alone. He really, really wants to get clear about this not identifying with clarity. He asks, "If you don't know, why do you say that you don't identify with clarity?" And Zhaozhou answers, with abrupt, unassailable finality: "You're asking about a matter you already grasp. Make your bow and step back." Yikes.

So when Zhaozhou asks, "Can you live like that?" he's not simply posing an intellectual challenge, "strap on your clear zen mind that doesn't cling to concepts." There's something truly frightening about not identifying with clarity. Zhaozhou says, "You're asking about a matter you already grasp."

And you don't need to be a special zen smarty pants to grasp it, in fact you need to loosen the intellect's determined grip on problem solving to do so. But it goes deeper than that. I think Zhaozhou's rejoinder pinpoints, and pierces, the student's motivation here. It's not just an innocent wish to understand, to get clear. Instead, the student is avoiding something he already knows, deep down, but doesn't want to know. Or to put it differently, something already knows him. And it knows us too. But this isn't the sort of conceptual knowing the student is after. It's something we know in our bones, because it knows us in our bones.

So we're back to Hinton again: all return, penetrating everywhere. Things emerge and die back. And what knows this is deeper than the clarity Zhaozhou says he doesn't live by. It involves a continuous giving up, relinquishing, of what that sort of clarity has grasped and wants to hold onto. Clarity, clear modeling, has an instrumental function, one key aspect of which is keeping the lions and tigers and bears out of our house and off our back. But it can't keep the dragons out. What we already understand is that understanding won't save us from that.

But of course Zhaozhou might well mean something rather different from the clarity of model making, figuring stuff out, instrumental or technological reason and its projects and triumphs. He might mean kind of the opposite of those: prajna, or prajnaparamita, the wisdom beyond wisdom, beyond the "knowing" that language and names and models make possible: "when knowing stops," as we recite in our refuge ceremony. But I think he's saying, also, "I don't identify with that either, I don't identify with the clarity that emerges in those moments or periods when knowing stops." As Yuanwu says so often in his commentary in the *Blue Cliff Record*, "when you get there you need a place to turn around." You have to get off your cushion, or descend from the mystic peak, or step off the hundred foot pole, and get back in the game. Which, paradoxically, will often involve getting back in the game of modeling, of naming and planning and trying to be useful. And I think that's ok with dragons. The tradition says that dragons don't like tranquil pools that turn into "dead water." They like to stir things up, that's why they have dragon tails. So even our deepest insights, our deepest and stillest zen experiences, aren't a clarity we can settle down in. And we know this: deep down, it's a matter we already understand.

But the temptation, the fantasy, is canny and pops up again in a million forms, it keeps trying to turn prajna into "refuge from" rather than "refuge in," a fortress or safe house that saves us, or a get out of jail free card we probably crave even if we think we've learned not to crave it. We fall into the probably inescapable human tendency to conceptualize and then cling to our concepts: so even prajna, that knowing beyond knowing that undoes mere conceptual clarity, tends to turn, as we mull it over, into an object our intellectual clarity can grasp onto, maybe cling to for dear life. Zen practice isn't exempt from what Freud called word magic or magic thinking, which we all continue to believe in even though we don't believe in it. So we need to liberate the antidote.

It's probably no surprise that there's a whole strand of koans intent on making us confront this persistent fantasy, of our zen practice as a kind of magic talisman that exempts and preserves us; of course we don't believe that, but we believe it. Here's the mother of all these koans, since it doubles down and confronts not just our own inevitable dissolution, but the disintegration of the universe as well (and wouldn't the universe be the safest, most enduring possible bank in which to deposit that get out of jail free card we don't but do believe in?). This scary koan—by now this is maybe no surprise—offers us another diligent student who acts like they just want to get clear, no personal stake in the matter at all, nosir. The case is "Dashui's fire at the end of the kalpa," from the *Blue Cliff Record*. A student asks Dashui, "It's clear that the fire at the end of this kalpa will

completely destroy the universe. I'm still not clear whether there's something that won't be destroyed." "I'm still not clear": it sounds like a diligent intellectual question; please clarify the doctrine and the dharma, teacher. But I don't think it's so disinterested or innocent. Dashui answers with blunt finality: "It will be destroyed." Holy moly! So it wouldn't be remarkable for the student to feel unnerved. What's notable, though, is their refusal or inability to acknowledge that. Instead, the student repeats their question, as if there must have been some misunderstanding, something unclear in Dashui's previous response. He couldn't possibly have meant what he said, could he? The student asks: "It'll leave along with everything else?" Dashui just parrots it back, no explaining or temporizing: "It'll leave along with everything else."

Holy moly indeed. Why practice then? I think Dashui's answer probably flabbergasts the student but, more than that, deeply disconcerts or distresses them: how could getting clear, acquiring correct zen understanding, *not* provide us with some secure, special exemption from dragon energies? It might not be "the self" that's exempt and preserved from the "return" that overcomes everything else. But there must be *something*. If not, what's the point of zen practice?

But in *our* koan, I think Zhaozhou relinquishes all that: "I don't identify with clarity. Can you live like that?" So prajna would emerge *in* the process and as an aspect of it, not as the final destination that keeps us safe from "return." In the great "flag moving in the wind" koan, Huineng says "it's the mind that moves." In his poem on the case, Wumen says "the mind doesn't move." Who's right? Well, try to peel one away from the other; you might or might not manage to, but maybe that's not the goal. Everything changes, flutters in the wind, or writhes and moves, like dragon. And maybe that's exactly where and how, as Wumen says, the mind doesn't move; how nothing moves. So maybe "I don't identify with clarity" is a pretty good mantra for slipping into our retreat. You can stop making sense. You can let yourself get unmoored.

I guess all this, so far, has been kind of a long shaggy dog story, the letdown punchline of which is something like: trying hard to think clearly maybe isn't the best way to spend your time in retreat. Freud says that in the unconscious "it's raining" and "it's not raining" can both be true, at the same time. That's fuzzy logic, for sure. Can you let yourself live like that, as least for a while?

But (little zen joke) I do want to clarify something about not identifying with clarity. Zen isn't a fundamentalism; it's pluralist, happy to put one partial truth right next to another, and let us slide back and forth between them to get a feel for the utility, and the limits, of each. I don't think zen is dismissive of language or naming or model making. But it wants to trace the limits of their utility, and it wants to impress on us how much of what's crucial for us to let into our heart-minds remains outside those limits, or manages to make itself visible to "clear thinking" only in distorted form.

That's so even though clear thinking or model making is functional in a lot of ways. It gets us out of a lot of jams. It's possibly humanity's key adaptive trait. William James in his book *Pragmatism* talks about the "instrumental value" of the models we use to navigate the world and accomplish stuff. James's American pragmatism is helpfully understood as philosophy's response to Darwin's notion of natural selection: our thinking, our categorizing and model making, must be adaptive, must give us a leg up in our dealings with our environment; if it wasn't adaptive, evolution would have weeded it out (and may still do so; see "the sixth extinction"). Our models, James says, are instruments. They're like tools that we use to get ahold of things and accomplish our goals. So models are purpose and situation specific; they won't necessarily hold true or be helpful in all situations and

for all time. They are subject to modification as our situation changes, as we get new data from the world, and as our purposes change. Joan likes to call them our "best guesses," which is very much in the spirit of pragmatism. By the way, D.T. Suzuki supposedly said zen would find a congenial home in the U.S. because if was so compatible with American pragmatism. But at the same time: our practice is very much about allowing in what we can't change or get a handle on, aspects of the world that are not susceptible to human management: "nothing will do; what will you do?" as a koan says. And it's also about a kind of obverse experience, where we sense, sometimes deeply, an aspect of things that doesn't *need* management: everything feels radiant and still, and unspeakably beautiful and profound, so long as we don't start trying to tinker and adjust it; just to find oneself immersed in this radiant field is deeply transformative. And part of that transformative experience is feeling ourselves to be, at bottom, at one with the world and at rest in it and as it, not standing over against it to manage and categorize and judge.

Our experience within language is fundamentally different from this deep sense of continuity and immersion. In language, we sort and divide by naming, and we judge by predicating: "this jacket is too small." But our ability to make these distinctions, linguists say, reprising a fundamental understanding of Buddhism, depends on a prior, enabling separation: I have to regard myself as an "I," a separate self, a knowing "subject," a speaking being, standing over against a separate world of "objects" I can name and categorize and make assertions about. There's tremendous adaptive power in that, we're apex predators after all; but it comes at the cost of fundamental alienation from all that we imagine we stand over against in order to know and manage. Again, see "sixth extinction": or, enter the dragon, a figure for all that exceeds our powers, our clear thinking. And probably about 99.99 plus percent of what keeps us alive and well for the time being has nothing to do with our human intentions and tinkering; it's just so, going about its non-human business and letting us float on its currents. And then it doesn't, it lets us fall through, "return."

Here's another little story about recognizing limits, the point of which is something like: language and modeling and clear thinking great; but not if you cling to them constantly. The slightly kinky part of the story probably isn't exactly pertinent, but it's pretty great, so I'll keep it in and underline it. I remember a lovely interaction on Groucho Marx's 1950s quiz show, the name of which was "You Bet Your Life," a lucky zen coincidence. Groucho would chat his contestants up a bit before the quiz began, which gave him a little time to be Groucho, always a pleasure. A little bit into the conversation:

> Groucho: and how many kids do you have?
> contestant: eleven
> Groucho: eleven?!
> contestant: I love my wife
> Groucho: I love my cigar, but I take it out of my mouth every once in a while.

We wouldn't think much of it nowadays maybe, and maybe back in the 1950s hardly anyone would have been "woke" enough to even notice it, especially if they were prim and proper. Freud, an inveterate smoker, said "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar," but he said it because he knew that mostly, in our imaginations, it's more than that; and Groucho puts all that in his mouth on prime time 1950s tv, and everyone laughs, maybe both not knowing and knowing what they're laughing about. Yunmen might call it an upside down statement—a moment of non-heteronormative thinking, about fifty years ahead of its time.

Be that as it may, my actual point is less interesting: maybe take your clear thinking out of your mouth for awhile. You can always resume the pleasure.

Another way to say all this, which I hope might be a bit helpful in encouraging you relax into retreat: awakening is not a kind of perfected knowing. It's true that there are strands in the tradition that talk about enlightenment as a kind of Superman x-ray vision, a leaping free of the mere phenomena known to delusive human perception, to experience the clear seeing of noumena, the "things in themselves" as they really are, in their essence, now firmly grasped and mastered as "objects" we know all the way down to their core: gotcha, object! and gotcha, world and universe! I've become the apex Knower, knowing the Ultimate Known. But, in its triumphant and knowing separation, this superman knowledge doesn't sound exactly zen-like, does it?

And it's sure not "when knowing stops," that phrase that begins our refuge ceremony. And it's not the predominant understanding of what happens in awakening, which is less like the Spanish "saber" and more like an instance of "conocer," a familiarity or intimacy. So here's another account. Sometimes, when we stop making sense, we stop standing over against everything, we stop trying to manipulate things, and we experience ourselves as just one of those things, not so different from the dog or the saguaro or the table or chair; like them, we're both interwoven and not interwoven, this interweaving going on and on while each things stands in its own place. Nothing, for the moment and from this partial but crucial perspective, to handle or manage or fix, to master by categorizing and triaging. So in a way our project is not to become a better knower, but to allow ourselves to be just another creature in the world. There's a really beautiful thing that I've only read about because my dogs are not very well behaved, but in dog training, apparently, one of the last stages is called "the dog stands for examination." That might sound cruel, but I don't think it is. And what that means is you bring your dog -- I've only read about this -- you bring your dog to the class, and you tell it to stand for examination, and you can step away from your dog, and it will let other people, strangers even, come up and touch it –because you told your dog that would be ok, and your dog has taken you at your word. It's a deep, and moving, sense of trust and availability. So in retreat, which is a situation we can probably also trust: can we let ourselves be the dog who stands for examination? Can we let the world touch us? Maybe that's zen practice.

In this connection I want to quote a few passages from Dale Wright's wonderful book *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism*. The quotations get somewhat complicated, but I think the gist is pretty simple: zen practice involves not a perfected knowing but a relinquishing of the quest for certainty and a releasing of our determined attempts to grasp and hold things, to get a firm grip on what's essential; and it *is* essential, but it's not something we can grasp or hold. The book is a long meditation on Huangbo's *Transmission of Mind* and the sense of zen practice it articulates. I'm going to quote four fairly long excerpts from the book's final chapter. Here's the first:

> The Huangbo texts have Bodhidharma pose the challenge of "enlightenment" as follows: "When we recognize the nature of mind, all we can say is that it is unthinkable. In understanding, nothing is attained. When we obtain it, we cannot say we 'know.' When I teach you this matter, can you withstand it?"

That's like the Zhaozhou: "I don't identify with clarity. Can you live like that?" And then Wright comments:

> Enlightenment in this image is a human comportment in view of the abandonment of all solid grounds, including the search for such grounds. Release into the experience is simultaneous with release of all claims to possess, to grasp, and to know. It follows the concept emptiness into its denial of all claims to truth and absoluteness, including its own claim to know something ultimately truthful about all claims.

And a bit further on Wright says:

> This expansive openness is described as difficult and anxiety-provoking. Opening to larger spheres beyond the self discloses the self's groundlessness and mortality--its own emptiness. In this sense, enlightenment is not simply a matter of personal fulfillment, a psychological self-improvement. Instead, abandoning the security of self-understanding, it entails exposure to transpersonal contexts beyond the self.

And then:

> The process of Zen practice is thought to lead, not to definitive knowledge or grounding in certainty, but rather to an openness better characterized by "letting go." Therefore, the literature of Huangbo does not propose a conception of the "true self," nor does it conclude in any account of "the way things really are." Instead, it suggests practices of thought and images of masters who let go of thought even while thinking.

And then finally, more briefly: "To be enlightened, then, is to be a willing and open respondent, to have achieved an open reciprocity with the world through certain dimensions of self-negation."

OK: that's part one of this talk: not sticking to clarity; letting go.

Part Two: Falling Off a Log

So the project in some way is just to be where we already are, in the world, to let ourselves slide out of the position of the separate knower, standing over against things we know and getting a handle on them. And we don't have to work at doing that, in fact it's not something we can do—it's the opposite of doing--we just have to let it happen.

Joan used to say, when she sensed that something like this was happening for someone—especially in retreat--when their grasping had loosened and they were falling open, "when you get here, you don't need to try to do any more; you just have to do a little less." That's the falling off a log part. It's as easy as falling off a log, we say. But of course it might be pretty hard to fall off a log, to let go and let yourself do that. If there's a log here and I'm sitting on it . . . right? Maybe I couldn't do it. It's scary, in a visceral way, or anyway it's awkward and I can feel myself bracing against it.
So here are a few possible practices that might help in letting ourselves let go and fall.
Some of them aren't so scary: they are kind of like gently or slowly letting ourselves slip or slide off the log, little by little. And then later I'll mention one that is more like a big whoops! banana peel moment. So boom, you fell, and suddenly you're off the log. Partly I'll be repeating and amplifying some things I said last night. I hope that's ok.

Most of these involve loosening the grip of recursive thinking, thinking that loops back and examines what it thought in order to refine it; that's one of the key ways we try to get a grip on things, and we often succeed, though we often fail. But what if for now we're not trying to get a grip on things?

The Antonioni movie "Blow Up," which some of you may remember, offers a neat image of recursive thinking and its possible power. At least as I remember it, the hero is a photographer who is trying to solve a crime that he took lots of pictures of while it was happening in front of him, but the pictures, at first look, don't give him the information he needs to make sense of what's happened. So he spends lots of hours in his darkroom, doing what we see all the time now on tv cop shows, but back then, pre-digital, it wasn't a common movie thing and the technology was much more rudimentary and laborious: he slowly makes bigger and bigger blowups, magnifications, of what gradually emerge as the likely key details, cropping out everything but the part of the newest picture that might provide a crucial clue, if only he can look closer, home in on the part that's beginning to seem important. And eventually, through all this re-examining, he can see what he needs to see and figure out what he needs to figure out to solve the crime. At least that's how I remember it. It's like thinking on steroids. We humans can do more than perceive: we can "apperceive," make our perceptions the object of further perceptions, and in language we can make our assertions the topic of further, more refined assertions; and so on. And this recursive ability, to call up and repeat images of prior sensations, or make new modified assertions based on our own prior assertions, has tremendous adaptive value. We can accomplish a whole lot with it. You can compare this image to that image, blow up this one, blow up the other one, and make a clearer and clearer picture of something; and a lot of the time, this recursively generated picture, or model or assertion, does pick out details that for our purposes are essential to see, and they give us a handle on things.

But Zhaozou says he doesn't identify with clarity. Sometimes the clarity can be delusive: our picture is clearer and clearer but it leaves out something essential about the situation, which our "clarity" won't let us see. For that matter, the very notion of clear and sharp boundaries between this and that is already delusive. And also, getting a handle on some things isn't possible, and trying to isn't desirable.

So: what are some ways in which retreat, and retreat activities and their rhythms, can loosen the hold this sort of recursive thinking has on us, if we allow that to happen?

Of course meditation itself is the most obvious way, really just mindfulness or Meditation 101, Suzuki telling us to give our sheep a really big pasture to roam around in, thoughts and concerns sometimes approaching or occupying the center of our awareness, then wandering off into the distance if we don't we try to pen them in close to us. We don't try to grab them and refine them. And when we let them wander freely, it's not just that we don't hang onto one image or thought or concern intently enough to get really clear about it—it gets fuzzy as it fades into the distance—but also that the foundational distinction between ourselves—the thinking self, "over here"—and what we're thinking about--the world of objects "over there"—also gets blurry. There aren't such clear demarcations between the "objects" we're thinking about, the thoughts themselves, and the self we think is doing the thinking.

There's usually also a bodily component, or correlate, to this fuzzing up of mental borders. My fuzzy thinking feels like it slides me into the world, and in those moments my body also feels like it slips

into the flow of things and carries me along with them, as one of them, or at one with them. And of course that sense of things comes and goes, so whether I'm there or not also gets a little fuzzy.

And a lot of the time, as a retreat goes on, recursive thinking just gets harder to do. Obsessive that I am, I give it the old college try, even if I think I'm not supposed to, but I find myself losing the thread, I just can't sustain it. That might feel like a failure at first, but then it tends to feel like a relief. Oops I lost the thread; I can't quite remember the supposedly vital "point" I was just about to get clear on. Well, nothing to do but let it go. Koans are really good in this regard, since they tend to be resistant to the sort of clarification determined thinking is pushing for. And thinking is usually pretty determined. At least initially, we tend to stand outside the koan and try to figure out what it means and make sense of it; it's a recalcitrant object we're trying to get a handle on. I know I'm not supposed to be doing this, but jeez, hang on a second—I've almost got it! Like there's just one more step and it'll all fit together. And then the koan just goes whoops, or thinking does or I do, and my cogitations go right out the window. What was I even thinking? I can't get a grip on it now.

And in that moment, maybe, having lost my analytic perspective *on* the koan, my clearer and clearer thoughts about it, whoops, I'm just sort of inside the landscape of the koan instead, and that's when the real fun starts. I'm dreaming with the koan, or it's dreaming me; or I'm seeing the things, but also I *am* the things. So koans will mess with you; they'll mess yourself up.

The Santoka haiku koan that most of us know is a good example: " This is the stone, drenched with rain / that points the way." Maybe we start this way: what does the stone mean? What does the rain mean? What does "the way" mean? Or, what do they "symbolize"? What are they "metaphors for"? And at that point, abstract thinking starts gleefully rubbing its hands together, getting ready to have a field day.

Then maybe: how can I figure out how I can use this? How does it "apply" to me? Like, what are three things in my life that are like the stone? Are they good or bad? What are four aspects of myself that are like the rain? And are *they* good or bad? And won't all this "point the way," tell me where I need to head off to in order to finally get what's missing where I am right now, or how I need to change myself to be what I want to be, in harmony with the Tao? Which direction is this dharma road sign pointing?

But I think at some point we tire ourselves out with all that; thinking kind of slips a cog and we relax a little, and then we're just dreaming this landscape, or dreaming in the landscape, or as it. I can feel myself as the stone. I can feel myself as the rain. And I can feel myself as the Way, even if I'm not quite sure what that means; or I feel the Way, the Tao, inside me. And then some other images start to arise, as if from some deeper place: remembered scenes, or maybe scenes made up of fragments of multiple memories, dreamily combined. And these are less clever, less cogitated, than the kinds of connections I made at first—that initial somewhat clunky stuff like "the stone symbolizes my steadfastness"—and these new, emerging images have more power to soften who I am, and to fuzz up and begin to shift who I think I am.

There are all kind of koans, of course. Here's one that seems to take things to the next level: it feels like a koan that images and draws me in to *how* koan meditation changes my thinking, and begins to change me. It's another Zhaozhou koan. I don't think it's incidental that its imagery makes crucial use of water: fluid, in flux, dissolving fixed positions; and, by the way, though not overtly in this koan, down at the bottom a place where dragons settle in and rest. It's *Blue Cliff Record* case 80,

Zhaozhou's Mind of a Newborn Baby. It starts this way: "A student asked Zhaozhou, does a newborn baby have consciousness?" Quick sidebar: in the Yogacara-derived map of the human sensorium and mind alluded to here, there are eight kinds or levels of consciousness. We'll leave seven and eight for some other time. But the first six are associated with "the senses": so, the five sense consciousnesses we're all familiar with, like for the five senses, sight hearing smell taste touch, pretty much just like the way we think of it. And then a sixth one, also named, somewhat confusingly or redundantly, "consciousness": it has thoughts as its object, just like the sense of hearing has sounds as its object. And that's what the student is asking about: "does a newborn baby have the sixth consciousness that has thoughts as its object?" That is, can it make a thought the object of its thought, can it do recursive thinking? And Zhaozhou doesn't say yes and he doesn't say no. He offers an ambiguous image. He says "tossing a ball on rushing waters." The koan goes on: "The student went on to ask Touzi"--they're still not clear, they want to get clear, they want to come back to it, recursively-- 'What does tossing a ball on rushing waters mean?" Touzi said, "moment after moment, it never stops flowing." So there's just the smallest bit of thought seeing a thought, but whoops, down the river it goes, the newborn can't hold onto it. It's just the tiniest bit of undeveloped apperception. And the commentary says, the baby's practice is the best, the purest. And it sounds something like our mind sometimes in meditation, or in retreat. We're aware of our thought, but it's a thought that's not quite grasping something, and the thinking that sees that thought can't quite grasp *it*. And sometimes, thankfully, we give up trying and just take the ride. Moment by moment it never stops flowing. And that can feel like Wuwei, "nothing's own doing." The thoughts don't quite feel like "mine" anymore. And, by the way, that seems to be pretty much what the Sixth Ancestor, Huineng, meant by "no mind," as in D.T. Suzuki's book *The Zen Doctrine of No Mind*: not a total blank or a dead space, but Wuwei, "nothing's own doing": "moment by moment it never stops flowing."

One of the things I love about these images of "tossing a ball on rushing water" and "moment by moment it never stops flowing" is that it's hard to keep on thinking of them as "just a metaphor," or at least as "just a metaphor" the way beginning lit students who are uncomfortable with metaphor want to pigeon-hole it so they can be done with it. Here's what they want to do: Oh when it says this thing about the baby's thinking it just means "one thought follows another very quickly," so now I get "the meaning of the metaphor," it's like a kind of code, and now that I've cracked the code I can forget all that junk about the ball tossed on rushing water and the current carrying the ball along because it's really just "one thought follows another" so we're all done with metaphor here, we solved it we can abide in the clarity of what the metaphor means and everything's all neat again no more fuzzy thinking about the current and the ball carried along, I got the point, thank you very much, I'm good. But that's not how metaphor works and it's not how koans work. If we give ourselves to the image, maybe especially in meditation, we can feel our way into the scene it evokes in a bodily, visceral way. Maybe we're the ball (I always experience it as a beach ball, buoyant and bouncing on top of the current really quickly); or maybe we're the current; or maybe we're the interaction between them, the kind of light and bouncy, flowing reciprocity. But we're in it. And so our thinking, carried by the images and also *as* the images, gets all intertwined with our sense of our own bodies; and our bodies, in our imagining that now feels quite visceral, might sense themselves being carried along by the current, and carried also into and by the Sambhogakaya space, the metamorphic and malleable field, of the koan, where beachball and current and flow get all mixed up and mingled together. So it's embodied thinking, or embodied imagining. And traces of that sort of visceral experience stay in our bodies even when we're not thinking consciously about the images anymore, and they probably stay in something like the texture and rhythm of our imaginative life as well; and I think they have a really long half-life in the body, diminishing only very

slowly over time. They change us. And, though I won't go into this tonight, the place in us where all that stuff lodges, and it lodges there forever the tradition says, is the eighth consciousness, the storehouse or the alaya vijnana; and that's also the tathagata garba, the womb of the buddhas or the matrix of our own enlightenment, already within us. That's for another time. But I'm suggesting that keeping company with koans in this way can carry us there.

The body feelings generated by the images in this particular koan turn out to be pretty typical of what often happens to us in retreat. There's the feeling of flow, which I've already talked about, of being carried along by, and as, the rhythms of the retreat as our bodies adapt to them and then become them, embody and carry *them*. And there's also, often, a feeling of buoyancy, not just emotional buoyancy but also physical: our bodies sometimes feel lighter, somehow, held up by air that can feel palpably supportive, a little as if we were buoyed up by water—a kind of dreamy, visceral magic. And there's a literal basis to it: air isn't a vacuum, you know, and if it weren't supporting us at all we'd probably fall right down, at least until we got used to the lack of support; but we don't usually notice or feel that. So our awareness of being supported is partly a function of the way our sensorium gets heightened over the course of a retreat, which koan meditation can augment. Suzuki's British student Grahame Petchey tells a story about doing a month long retreat and says that by the end of it he could hear the bugs crawling across the floor behind him. Or a fly lands on our wrist and we can see its eyes blink open and closed in rapid succession; we can see it with a kind of hyper-realist sharpness of detail. So sometimes we feel the air kind of buoying us up, and it's palpable. We really are supported by it. We don't have to do everything all by ourselves, or for ourselves; we can let go, we don't have to figure out how to take care of business all the time. So all this is related to not identifying with clarity: "When knowing stops." And it's hard to tell what's cause here and what's effect, but this malleable and metamorphic body and mind space, on the one hand, and our giving up our usual mental effort to figure everything out, on the other hand, reinforce one another in a kind of wonderful feedback loop, till "not knowing" feels like a gate, and a gift, and a blessing.

And any one of the six "sense consciousnesses" can slide us into this magical space: sights and sounds and smells and tastes, as well as the sense of touch and the blur of non-recursive thinking. Take sight. People often report that when the world opens up for them the light looks different, as if it were thick and viscous. Or sounds: a bird call or the rustling of branches and leaves might sound magically sharp and bright, or else thick and syrupy. And, somehow, we can feel those qualities registering or resonating in our own bodies, in a kind of unspectacular synesthesia, sights or sounds cuing a phantom sense of rhythm or touch, of motion or texture. And this blurring of the boundaries between one of our senses and another also facilitates the softening and blending process, further eroding our reliance on sharp and stable distinctions we can grab hold of.

These are all Sambhogakaya phenomena: it's a kind of contagious magic where we're affected and changed by what surrounds and enfolds us, becoming like it: and "this interweaving continues on and on," as Shitou says, even as we also sense that "each thing stands in its own place."
And it's not just the embracing, surrounding environment that can have this kind of visceral effect on us. Seemingly random particulars can also impinge on us in a way that drops us into the Sambhogakaya, a dreamlike space in which logical opposites no longer feel like contradictions or errors, where, again as Shitou says, "we and everything we perceive / are interwoven and not interwoven, / and this interweaving continues on and on, / while each thing stands in its own place."
These moments often involve the sort of unspectacular synesthesia I mentioned above. Specifically, something we see or hear often precipitates a phantom experience of motion or touch,

as if I were moving in tandem with some particular creature or thing I see moving; or as if I could feel its texture brush up against my skin and feel its particular texture. We'll see a tree limb moving in the breeze, or we'll hear the sound of a bird. And it's like you can feel the movement of the tree limb in your own body; it's a kind of visceral, kinetic echo. With the bird call, you can have the experience -- it's not accurate exactly, for sure--but it's like you can feel the sound coming out of your own mouth and get a kind of phantom sense of what it would feel like to have the head of the bird. Like I said, I'm sure it's not very accurate, you wouldn't pass an exam administered by a committee of birds; but it's immediate, and visceral, and in some way your experience of the bird is quite intimate, right here in your body, not just a concept that you, the knowing subject, have of the bird as a nameable category of object. Interwoven and not interwoven. It's like we give the tree or the bird a home in our own bodies, and our own heart/minds. So William Carlos Williams--he's talking about poets but I think it applies to all of us--he says poets are "taught by the largeness of their imaginations to feel every form which they see moving within themselves." That's sort of like catching and joining the rhythm of a dance, but here we catch the movement of some particular creature or thing. And in that moment our sense of "self" kind of falls away: for a nanosecond, anyway, it's just tree, or just bird. So we don't feel like we're occupying a fixed and separate position; we experience a kind of metamorphosis, or one metamorphosis after another. So the romantic poet Keats says of the poet or the "poetical Character"—but, again, I think it applies to all of us--"As to the poetical Character itself . . . . it has no self—it is every thing and nothing--It has no character. . . . A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other body—"

That's one reason I brought in the quotation from Tenkei at the beginning tonight as a pretend epigraph: "I throw it over to the other side. What other side? Other side of what?" Because in moments like those Keats evokes, I think it's we ourselves who are thrown over to the other side, and then the sense or notion of "other side" kind of disappears, at least for a moment, especially in its foundational form: human language and the knowing it generates turning us into a human "subject" as namer, standing on one side, over against an "object," on the other side, that we name and know. Our practice throws us over to the other side, where all the things we thought of as "objects" are. And at that point: What other side? Other side of what? We thought, and so we thought we were outside it; but we're in it, or we are it. We've entered that enchanted space evoked in our refuge ceremony: "when knowing stops." Or--a deeper enchantment--it feels like this space we've fallen into knows *us*. When we're inside this field, "moment by moment it never stops flowing." And, when my thinking returns, it feels as if this flowing includes it too, and it includes me. And this interweaving continues on and on.

Poets can be good at evoking this sense of things; Whitman, in particular, is pretty great at it. So here are a few wonderfully extravagant lines from his best poem, "Song of Myself", that give us a sense of being part of an embracing, metamorphic, fluid field:

> Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
> Earth of departed sunset! Earth of the mountains misty-topt!
> Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!
> Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!

Or in another passage from the same poem:

> The smoke of my own breath,

> Echoes, ripples, and buzzed whispers . . . . loveroot, silkthread, crotch and vine,
> My respiration and inspiration . . . . the beating of my heart . . . . the passing of blood and air through my lungs,
> The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and darkcolored sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn,
> The sound of the belched words of my voice . . . . words loosed to the eddies of the wind,
> A few light kisses . . . . a few embraces . . . . a reaching around of arms,
> The play of shine and shade on the trees ns the supple boughs wag

One of the great things Whitman does in this second passage is to alternate loosely between his experience of internal body sensations and his intimate awareness of stuff out there in the world around him. This oscillation gradually gives us the feeling that such interweaving is pervasive, if only we're available to receive it. It's also notable that there are no verbs here; immersed in a continuous flow, the poet seems to feel no need to make claims or assertions about it. There's just a kind of buzzing "isness" that includes the poet, and any edgy impulse to fix or tinker or adjust things seems to have simply fallen away. I think that's pretty much how things feel when we experience what our tradition calls the "thusness" or "suchness" or "Tathagata" of things, ourselves included.

Whitman is also really good at evoking the feeling of being taken over by some particular creature or thing that impinges on him with unlikely immediacy. This is the experience also evoked by Keats in a passage I quoted earlier:

> Or if a sparrow come before my window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel.

Here are a couple of Whitman's quick, deft evocations of this sort of experience of thusness: "the geese nip their food with short jerks"; "the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock." You can feel those, at least a little, in your own body; though the primary stimulus is visual, it generates a secondary, phantom experience of motion or texture. Here's a no frills poem by William Carlos Williams that works pretty much the same way, tracking the movements of a cat with an engrossed attentiveness that lets us experience those movements as, well, not exactly outside us. We get a feeling of inhabiting a phantom cat body that for the moment has commandeered our own:

As the cat
climbed over
the top of

the jamcloset
first the right
forefoot

carefully
then the hind
stepped down

into the pit of
the empty
flowerpot

All this poem does, really, is invite us to move with the cat, to inhabit its particular, attentively hesitant negotiating of its tricky environment. There's no "wise saying" here, and nothing especially poetic. Maybe that's why Williams titled it simply "Poem," like a cut-rate, generic, no frills instance of the genre. But I think he also meant: this *is too* a poem. In a way that's unobtrusive but deep, it helps us experience simply being in the world, living in it and with it and as it. That's not so different from what sometimes happens to our embodied attention during a retreat.

And it's a clue to beginning to feel at home with an initially disconcerting aspect of Work in the Room. One of the common bugaboos that can haunt these meetings is the teacher's request that we present our response to a koan physically, as well as talk about it. I remember someone saying, in her farewell speech to the sangha during a leave-taking ceremony for her during a California retreat, "the two scariest words in the English language are 'show me.'" But it's no more obscure or esoteric than responding to the Williams cat poem. It's not an attempt to put you on the spot; it's an invitation for you to notice the way your body is already responding to the koan as if you were inside the scenario it evokes, as if you were part of it, and to allow that embodied response to come through you. Pretty often, our hands are already doing that, making gestures, which we're often unaware of, as we're trying to describe our understanding verbally; and those gestures are already embodying our true response, often more intimately and eloquently than our words are. Here are some koans from our Miscellaneous collection that invite this sort of embodied engagement: "Make the mountains dance"; "Go straight up the mountain road with 99 curves." And these next ones don't request an explanation or an opinion, though they might seem to: "Why does the Russian River flow west to the sea?"; "Are dolphins really as smart as people say they are?" Like Wiliams says, we're "taught by the largeness of our imagination to feel every form which we see moving within ourself." So just let it come through you.

I think all this stuff about movement, our kinetic attunement, let's call it, to what's going on around us and also, viscerally, within us, is related to what Kelly said last night about letting go of clock time. Clock time is really useful, of course. It's like money: a portable, abstract medium useful for measuring one thing against another that makes it easy and convenient to exchange things or map them against each another, helping us get our business done. I'll bring my two watermelons over here and sell them for five dollars each, yielding ten dollars. I don't have to lug the watermelons around and find someone who wants them and also happens to have the cooking pot I want to buy, for the going rate of ten dollars; I just carry my cash being confident that since in this exchange market two watermelons "equal" one cooking pot that's the amount of money that will get me the pot I want. Same thing with clock time. I don't have to keep my eye on the guy hitting the densho before the morning block or even give my attention to the beautiful densho sequence; I just need to know it lasts ten minutes, so I can forget all about the bloke and the sequence and rest easy that if I linger for five minutes in the coffee room, out of sight and earshot of all that, I've still got five minutes to make it to the meditation hall. So I can safely let my relation to the beautiful densho pattern get a lot more abstract, I don't have to follow it but I'm still in control of the situation, the time situation. And of course there's a cost to all this despite the tremendous utility. I just map anything that's happening onto clock time, and I have a pretty good handle on how to fit my activities smoothly into the other rhythms and movements I don't want to get crosswise with, since if I plug those into clock time too I can pretty much ignore or forget about their particulars, and I'm still good. And it becomes a pervasive habit, so that in some way I'm mapping most movements and durations onto clock time, this abstract, completely mathematicised and therefore very useful, pragmatic way to measure duration. But one cost of this is that I tend to lose my innate awareness

of the beautiful ways the multiple rhythms of duration and change going on all around me inter-relate or interweave, as if in a dance that's elusively but profoundly choreographed: the rhythms of the birds moving in complex but palpable relation to the movements of the breeze bending the grass; the cat licking and cleaning itself as the afternoon light slides slowly across the surface he lies on; the duration of a sitting period in discernable counterpoint to the length of our walking meditation, and in the walking meditation all of us moving softly in a curving line around the hall, not in perfect sync but in a rhythmic relation one with another that we sense even when we're not conscious of it; the sitting period and the longer sitting blocks; and the early morning, late morning, and afternoon blocks nestled within the long gradual movement of the day, the sun slipping slowly across the discernible landmarks and across the sky. And the patterns made by our own bodies and our own heart/minds, moving in rhythmic relation to all the other movements and rhythms we sense, or that our bodies remember. I notice that the more wedded I am to clock time the less aware I am of these patterns, this dance; and that, when clock time pretty much falls away, all these interpermeating rhythms come forward, and I join them. I'm not holding everything to a single, human-made standard of comparison and measurement. In clock time, all movements and rhythms get calibrated against these perfectly regular intervals. Without clock time, the comparisons are multiple and dispersed, spread out; and my own rhythmic movement is one among many, an interweaving of tempos and durations, syncopations and flows, that is beautiful, and supportive and sustaining, pretty much whenever I let myself feel this attunement. And there's no single master tempo or measure that I need to yank everything over to and calibrate against. Still, there is something, a kind of grounding tempo; something "underneath" is kind of how it feels. And it's always there, but in some places it seems to be especially palpable: in a redwood forest, say, or here in the Sonoran Desert. Some of the rhythms in these places are really, really slow, their durations really long; and we become aware of the shorter, quicker rhythms of birds, and animals, and flowers bending in the wind, moving in subtle relation to those slower, barely discernible, intuited tempos: redwood or cactus growth or decay, the saguaro biding its time as it grows imperceptibly—for about 50 years or so—till it's ready to start poking out its first limb. And underneath those super slow rhythms, even, an intuited sense of absolute stillness, eternity or timelessness—in relation to which, illogically or paradoxically, we can sense each thing that moves finding its own particular tempo or time signature. Including ourselves. We can feel that deep attuning in our bodies—of our own individual time signatures and also of the traces of the many other tempos—the ten thousand things--moving through us, all in relation to those nearly timeless rhythms of redwood or saguaro, and to the eternal stillness they simultaneously emerge from and embody.

I think these experiences of embodied, interpermeating rhythms are a pretty deep way of "being present," though they might not jibe very well with some current notions of what it means to be mindful; for the most part they belong more to the body than to conscious awareness. But the whole notion of "being present" is actually rather elusive, and it has a lot of possible meanings, not all of which fit neatly into the currently popular views of mindfulness. For starters, "being present" to what? I think koan practice is very much a case in point. How is what our tradition calls "koan introspection," bringing a koan into our meditation the way we do, an instance of being present? I think it is, but not in a way that some mindfulness practices would recognize; it's a weird fit. Like, I'm supposed to be mindful, be aware, of right where I am, here and now? Well, I'm sitting in the hall, focusing on my breath to center or ground myself, and I'm aware of my surroundings, or the sensations provoked by my surroundings; and when I find I'm thinking about today's dinner or yesterday's bitter argument, I'm supposed to use that as an occasion to return to my awareness of my breathing, to being present where I am. OK then, how come it's a good thing, on this sunny day,

to let my mind wander into a scenario where there's no sunshine, and I'm not in the hall anymore, I'm out in the desert somewhere, or the woods; and there's a stone, and I feel my way into seeing it pretty clearly; and it's drenched with rain; and also this rain-drenched stone is pointing the way, whatever that might mean. And I let myself sink into the mystery of that, I keep company with it as a sort of question even though I don't think I'm the one who's going to answer it--the "answer," not a very good term here, will just materialize out of somewhere, or nowhere; and I'm actually encouraged to allow myself to sink more and more deeply into this imaginary scenario, or anyway some remembered scenario I'm accessing via my imagination, not present sensory awareness. How come we do this? And what does it suggest about "being present"? What are we being present to? Well, for one thing, I'm not sure we can imagine something "from scratch," as it were: I'm guessing what the mind's eye sees might be something we've seen in the past, a memory; or it's a blurring and blending and recombining of fragments of various memories into a new composite; or it's an evolving metamorphosis that starts from there. For me, anyway, this sort of imaginative wandering off often happens in koan meditation, and over the years I've learned to let go of the urge to resist it. Usually I'll find myself initially in a remembered or imagined scene that's pretty closely related to what the koan describes, though it's my own particular version of it, and I feel my way into that. But often my mind doesn't stay there, the scene morphs into something no longer so tightly tied to the koan, and I follow where it leads, I inhabit it: from the stone drenched with rain to a giant rock face, maybe, or else from rain falling on the stone to rain falling into the ocean; or just to the ocean, rocking. Is this ok? And it gets worse. This sort of experience with koans can turn out to be a gateway drug: sometimes I might find my meditation doing this sort of wandering spontaneously, even when I'm not sitting with a koan, I'm just watching my breath, say. And then I'm seeing, once again, a low stone wall out my upstairs bedroom window in upstate New York where I used to spend summers with my family, from around age eight to age twelve. It was one of those country walls built by hand, probably a long time ago, with considerable skill, out of stones of all shapes and sizes, expertly balanced and wedged into something stable and enduring. It was maybe fifty feet away from my window, with somewhat unkempt grass filling the little field between the house and that wall. And I can't remember any special significance the wall had; it wasn't part of any story or important incident I can remember. it's not, you know, oh, that reminds me of this time my father was mean to me and I went up to my room and stared sadly out the window, or something like that. There's just this wall of stones, etched in the mind's eye; or there's just the tree all the kids in my building in "the city" used to climb, with some of its limbs hanging out over the sidewalk which was about three feet down from the rocky ground where the tree stood; or there's just a particular porch or the view of some particular landscape, or else a composite of landscapes, returning for no discernable reason.

But that low rock wall in the country, in particular, keeps coming back to me, in meditation, at least several times a year, for years now. Who knows why? And that actually turns out to be part of its value, that "who knows why?" aspect. At least that's what the tradition says. But is this sort of imaginative wandering, dreaminess even, really ok? I think a lot of meditation methods would say nope, it's not ok, you're drifting or dreaming and you're being "lax," you're not being present. But I'm not so sure it's a bad thing. I think we're in the territory here of what the tradition calls the storehouse consciousness, the alaya vijñāna; and also of the tathagata garba, the womb of the buddhas. The tradition says the alaya vijñāna is the repository of everything the organism has experienced over the course of a lifetime, experiences we were conscious of and also those we weren't conscious of; and it includes everything received by the perceptual system-- the giant percentage of sensory input the organism took in without consciousness marking it, as well as the tiny percentage that consciousness found significant enough to track. And all of that, supposedly, is

stored in the organism, in this deep level of the mind, a kind of visceral repository of everything experienced. So the storehouse is kind of like the union of all the sets into which Freud divided the mind in his first topography: it includes everything that once resided in consciousness; and everything the perceptual system took in whether consciously or not; and the "preconscious thoughts" that never rose to the level of awareness because they didn't seem to be of vital importance to the self; and repressed material, along with archaic, "illogical" modes of thinking, the domain Freud called the Unconscious. It's mostly filled with material the self hasn't grabbed hold of as important enough for its well-being to work over and turn into an argument, a case for or against something, or a narrative it has opinions about or that it wants to bend toward what it regards as a good, desirable outcome. It's just a pool of endlessly multiple material, arrayed randomly or with the loosest sort of organization or connection among its disparate elements. The yogacara system called this the eighth level of the mind or "consciousness," the storehouse or alaya vijñāna. But another aspect of the mind grabs hold of some of this material—maybe material that bears on the organism's survival, or pursuit of pleasure or avoidance of pain—and starts working it up into discernible, cohesive patterns, or it turns them into a narrative. And this worked-over material was regarded as constituting the seventh level of consciousness, the domain of manas or the sense of self. Maybe I don't understand the direction of causality here, or maybe it's ambiguous, a kind of two way street: I think this "level," comprising the patterned material turned into stories and given significance, is on the one hand the origin of a sense of self—the sense of self comes into "being" as "the one" to whom all these stories are significant, who tells them or owns them; and, on the other hand, once a sense of self has come into being, it keeps the ball rolling, finding "significant" material that bears on its purposes and stories, its wishes and desires, so that this seventh level keeps expanding, ramifying. And this seventh level, the domain of the "mistaken self," is intimately connected to the sixth, the consciousness that has thoughts for its object, and relies on the recursive thinking made possible by language. And most of the time, I think, most of us make our home and our living in this part of the mind, depending on—and captured by—the tight interaction among language, recursive thinking, and the sense of being a stable self who is running the show. But here's maybe the strangest part of this model or theory. Supposedly, even when the self does grab hold of some of the vast, unstructured collection of material in the eighth level, and turns it toward its own purposes up there in the seventh and sixth levels, the same material nonetheless simultaneously remains down below in the eighth, in its ungrabbed, un-worked-over state; the material is kind of magically doubled, in two places at the same time, so that it persists untethered to narrative or purpose even as, simultaneously, the self has got hold of a kind of duplicate version it can work with or work over. And the yogacara tradition says that the version that hasn't been grabbed hold of by the self, that hasn't been worked over to fit the self's projects—it's just kind of quiet, and calm, and tranquil, and timeless—that this material in the alaya vijnana is also, from a different perspective, the tathagata garba, the womb of the buddha or the womb of enlightenment; it's our own awakening already there inside us. So: back to that dreamy, associational aspect of meditation, and whether we're being "bad" not to squelch it: I think when those seemingly random memories, or imagined combinations or morphings of memories, float into and through our minds in meditation, especially if they arise spontaneously and without apparent rhyme or reason—especially if they don't obviously fit into some story we're invested in or pertain to some grievance or other argument we're ruminating over in our minds—I think those are manifestations of the storehouse rising into view, and that to keep company with them—without any discernable agenda or purpose, without any grabbing hold of them to enlist them in the projects of the self—can be part of the morphing of the alaya into the tathagata garba. These apparently spontaneous, seemingly random images appearing for no clear reason are part of the process of

our awakening, unfolding before the mind's eye, or folding the mind into their metamorphic, transformative flow. At least that's my sense of it.

Like other aspects of retreat, slipping into the storehouse consciousness and its seemingly random collection of sense memories also unmoors us a bit from linear time and the narrative sequences that drive much of our habitual behavior. So one thing that might get fuzzed up by our immersion in such material is our sense of time. Here's Dogin in "Uji," "The Time Being":
"The time-being has the quality of flowing. So-called today flows into tomorrow, today flows into yesterday, yesterday flows into today. And today flows into today, tomorrow flows into tomorrow." Here, as it were, cause and effect move both forward and backward, and, in its looping, time undoes and reconfigures their patterns. For me, the paradoxical movement Dogen evokes also conjures up a sense, or sensation, of a kind of eternal time, both flowing and still. Freud likewise suggested there's no time in the Unconscious, or a kind of timeless time. Ditto the storehouse consciousness. That low stone wall is oddly timeless.

Something odd also happens to our sense of space inside the storehouse. The organizing distinction between container and contained gets fuzzy, as if the world I'm inside is also inside me; these traces of the world lodged in the storehouse actually make up most of my internal experience. It's like the wonderful story by the great children's writer Maurice Sendak, *In the Night Kitchen*, where there's this little boy, Mickey, whose mom is pregnant and he's kind of freaked out by it, so he goes down to the kitchen at night and bakes himself a cake, to comfort himself. But he falls into the batter, which turns out, in this Sambhogakaya world, to be a good thing. While he's in there he keeps saying, "I'm in the milk and the milk's in me. I'm in the milk and the milk's in me." It's like Whitman says in one of his poems, about the poet and all the other people we think of as outside him: "Him they immerse and he immerses them." I think our experiences of this reversible, metamorphic space are instances of the alaya vijnana beginning to transform itself into the tathagata garba, wearing away at the distinctions that keep things separate, the self over here and the object world over there. I'm in the world and the world's in me. We might poo-poo that as fuzzy thinking; but it gives voice to something, obscured by clear thinking, that's deeply true.

So far, these stories about "ways to fall off a log" have all been instances of a "gradual" approach: little by little, we're slid off our separate perch, we slip into the world without hardly noticing when or how it happened. So just one more thing: the banana peel moment, the "sudden" experience of falling. I'm securely on the log. Then all of a sudden, whoops! what happened? I'm in free fall.

Here are a couple stories. This one's pretty famous; it's about the effect Great Master Ma could have on his students. Shuiliao arrives at Ma's temple, during the national cataclysm of the An Lushan Rebellion, when death and destruction were everywhere, consuming nearly all of China. And Shuiliao asks Mazu, "What is your school? What's your practice here?" And Mazu just kicks him in the chest and knocks him down. We wouldn't to that anymore, and it's surely objectionable in important ways, at least in our frame of reference. But Shuiliao jumps up, laughing and applauding. He's suddenly free. And later he says, "ever since Great Master Ma kicked me I have not stopped laughing." Like the banana peel, Mazu's kick clarifies something abruptly. Here I am being a person asking a question, trying to get clear about what to expect in Ma's monastery, how to be a self, navigating this unfamiliar place and practice. And them BLAM!, I'm just a body, knocked off my perch and falling; just one of the creatures and things in the world. And helping us experience that, which against all expectation can be profoundly revelatory and liberating, *is* the practice here, *is*

Ma's school, or at least a key aspect of it. I'm knocked off my perch on the log. Actually I am just another log, or a dog, or bird, or a human body getting knocked down. I'm in it. And it's in me. No matter what I think. In our day, we're pretty careful about this kind of stuff: kicking or hitting with the teacher's stick aren't part of the acceptable repertoire, which is surely a good thing; and I think we're appropriately cautious about provoking even a psychological banana-peel moment in conversation in Work in the Room, though it's not unheard of. But of course the world itself provides plenty of banana-peel type moments, which don't necessarily have to be so obviously drastic to produce at least something of the desired effect.

When you get knocked down you lose your bearings. And of course you can lose your bearings without going ass over teakettle. You can get suddenly lost in space/time. Maybe that's more likely to feel freeing as well as discomfiting if you have a practice; I'm not sure. Being really tired is also helpful, since your grip on the familiar space/time map is already a little tenuous. One time, making the familiar drive from Tucson to retreat in Santa Fe, I got off I-10 in Deming, as usual, to take the two-lane I-26 shortcut up to Hatch, where I'd pick up I-25 north to Santa Fe. But in Deming I missed my left turn, and drove about a block before I realized something wasn't right. And for the moment I had no idea at all where I was—I'd never seen this street before—and, more strangely, I also had no idea why I was wherever I was, or what I was doing there, or where on earth I was supposedly going. Momentary free fall. It was a little disconcerting, but mostly what I felt was that, whoever I was, I was free. I was in the world and the world was in me, for the moment, as safe boundaries and reassuring separations blurred out. Ditto an earlier experience, flying to retreat in northern California, also quite tired. The plane did a sudden drop—I have some ear problems and lose my spatial bearings with altitude changes—and for a moment the bottom fell out of everything: I couldn't remember where I was going and when I did I couldn't remember why I had wanted to go there, and I couldn't feel much connection with the old familiar self I thought I was. Things regrouped fairly quickly, but it was a suddenly disorienting experience I immediately felt grateful for. Not quite knowing who I was felt like a revelation of what I was, and a gift.

Here's a more dramatic instance from out of the zen storehouse. It's a story about Muso Soseki, the thirteenth-and-fourteenth-century zen teacher, poet, and pioneer of zen landscape garden design. It pulls two threads together: being a vulnerable body, and getting lost. The story takes place when Muso is still a struggling student, trying to "get it" and feeling he's floundering. So he goes to his teacher and asks, "Can you say a turning word for me?" Can you say something to help me? The teacher, a tough customer apparently, just says "There's no turning word in our school." That's not quite true, exactly, but that's what the teacher says. So Muso asks, "Can you at least give me your compassion?" And the teacher says, "There's no compassion in our school," or something like that. Which was itself an act of compassion, of the tough-love-school variety. But Muso didn't cotton to it, so he left. And then he found another teacher, with whom he continued to struggle. I can't remember whether they're in a monastic setting, but anyway it's rural, and Muso has developed a pattern of sitting out in the countryside at night and meditating, and then returning in the dark to his little hut. So one night he's been meditating really late and he starts to walk back to where he sleeps. And of course he knows the way back really well because he walks it every night. And he stops to rest for a moment where there's a little shed, he can't see it in the dark but he knows the shed is right there, and he extends his arm putting out a hand to brace himself against the wall. But the wall isn't there, and he falls. That's his banana peel moment—just a body falling in space—and it's also his dissolving map moment, he's not where he knew he was he doesn't know where he is. And he bursts out laughing, in the midst of a sudden and really big opening. He writes an enlightenment poem, part of it maybe sounds somewhat aggressive to us, he says "I smashed the

bones of the sky." But that phrase also gets at a crucial paradox that can be characteristic of such moments: I lost who I thought I was, I don't know who I am or where I am, whatever control or "agency" I thought I had at my command has vanished; and a nanosecond after that moment of disorienting freefall, of losing my self and being just a body I can't control, I feel this enormous energy and power coursing through me, emerging from me with no particular effort or forethought on my part. I'm just in it and of it, and I'm a conduit for something a lot bigger than myself, and a lot bigger than anything I could have imagined I might be a channel for. And in the poem Muso also says something like, after all this exile, you know, "now I'm home," which is really strange in a way, because it's this moment where he's completely lost his bearings. But really it's not strange: whoever I am and wherever that is, here I am, and here the world is. I'm home: riding the dragon. Or I'm here as the dragon coming through me, I'm here *because* the dragon's coming through me.

Not everyone who falls through a wall that's not there is going to feel this way, of course. Disorientation and the scare of falling aren't always liberating. Maybe it helps to have a practice. If you don't have a context for this kind of experience, it's maybe more apt to be mostly disconcerting and less likely to be transformative; maybe it's harder to feel at home with dragon, to let that energy course through with the sense that it's ok if chunks of the self kind of fall off or drop away in the process. The tradition calls this the Great Death and the Great Rebirth. That sounds kind of grandiose; but really it's no small thing.

There are a couple of Yunmen koans that make a nice pair in this regard: together, they highlight this pattern of death and rebirth, maybe call it psychological and spiritual death and rebirth. The first one is *Blue Cliff Record* case 22, which features a turtle-nosed snake. That sounds kind of goofy, like something cartoonish from Disney maybe, but Joan's note on the case says "Possibly a cobra. The turtle-nosed snake is ancient, gnarled, and venomous." So it's not so funny. Here's the koan. Yunmen is a student in this one, studying with the great teacher Xuefeng. So: Xuefeng said to the assembly, "There's a turtle-nosed snake on South Mountain. All of you should have a good look." Changqing says, "There definitely are people in this hall today who could lose their lives." Which makes the point, but making the point probably isn't the point. And Yunmen holds up his staff, as if it were the snake, and throws it down at Xuefeng's feet, making a show of fright: "Ahh!" As Xuansha comments later, "Why bring south mountain into it?" And Yunmen doesn't. For him it's right here and right now. At the drop of a hat.

In case 60 of the *Blue Cliff Record*, Yunmen is a teacher now. And he's still got his staff, which now clearly channels shamanic energies. He holds it up and says to the assembly, "This staff becomes a dragon. It has swallowed the whole universe. The mountains, rivers, and great earth, where do they come from?" And, again, it's not hypothetical, it's not some other place and time, it's not "what if?" It's here and now. So to go back to something Andrew said in his talk, this isn't "what does the dragon want?" It's not what would Jesus do, or what would the dragon do, hypothetically speaking; and then I'll try to model myself on that. Like Andrew said, it's what is the dragon doing? Here and now. The poet Ted Berrigan once remarked, somewhat cryptically maybe, "everything that's going to happen is already happening." It's just that simple and direct. The staff becomes the dragon and the dragon, right here and now, has swallowed the universe. So: the mountains, rivers, and great earth, where do they come from? And when do they do that? It's not hypothetical. Just look! Or, better, just feel them pour forth! Through what? And where's the staff? In Yumen's hands? Are you sure?

What if, instead, we're standing where Yunmen stands, in so many of the koans that feature him: at the center of the cosmos, at a kind of shamanic hinge between decreation and creation, emptiness

and form, Hinton's absence and presence, or eternity and time. I think he's standing at the place before those opposites get clearly separated out from each other—a kind of shamanic duck/rabbit. And we can feel ourselves standing there too, though not always with the high drama and outsized grandeur that characterize Yunmen koans.

So—finally!-- I want to end by really jumping traditions in a big way and evoking another version of this hinge place. It also suggests that, when we stand there, or here, we're not quite who or what we thought we were. This turns out to resonate with a story Andrew told, where one mythical emperor takes up what Andrew called the ego position, wanting to control the great river—I can't remember whether it's the Yellow River or the Yangtze--and bend it to his will, while another emperor works with the flow, shifting it a little but also taking advantage of the river's overpowering current rather than struggling against it.

Anyway our last stop is psychoanalysis, or a bit of psychoanalytic theory or discourse. There's a really famous dictum by Freud, from his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, in an essay titled "The Dissection of the Psychical Personality." The original is in German; I'll use the translation from the so-called the "Standard Edition" of Freud in English. Freud writes, as a kind of grand maxim, a description of the goal of psychoanalysis, "Where id was, there ego shall be." I'm going to oversimplify a little, since what's called Freud's second topography doesn't line up neatly with the first topography Freud laid out in his earlier *Interpretation of Dreams*, but the Id overlaps significantly with what he called there the Unconscious, and with instinct, and what he calls "the psychic representation of the drives." Apparently a pretty literal translation of "the Id" would be "the It": it's in me but it feels other, alien. Whereas you could translate "the Ego" as "the I," and apparently in the original German that's literally what the the two words Freud used mean, just "It" and "I": "where It was, there I shall be." And then he says, and I love the chutzpah of it, "It is a work of culture – not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee," which would have been one of those areas in Holland where they had built dikes to prevent the water flooding the land that was below sea level, but you had to keep actively draining the water anyway or it would overflow them and inundate the land. So it's got a kind of colonial vibe to it, in the sense of keeping vast natural, "uncivilized" forces from overwhelming the civilized territory. Freud here is championing the ability of consciousness, of civilization, of the ego or the I or the self, to take control of places that used to belong to instinct, to nature, or to "human nature" before civilization comes in and, well, civilizes the territory. That colonizing project, though I love the boldness with which Freud lays it out, doesn't feel much like zen, or chan, or living with dragon, or being in the Tao. So Jacques Lacan, a kind of arch, very French, poststructuralist psychoanalyst and psychoanalytic theorist, who was quite scornful of American ego psychology and was supposedly also pretty influenced by Buddhism, rails against this triumphal phrase, "Where id was, there ego shall be." Then he offers his own reformulation. Here's the standard English translation of his original French: "'There where It was,' I should like it to be understood, 'it is my duty that I should come into being.'" This feels different, doesn't it? It doesn't suggest an image of the imperial self conquering foreign territory or taming and civilizing inhuman forces. Instead, I "come into being," I come forth, in that place where "it" was, and, I think Lacan implies, as a function of it. That's not mastering and taming the "It," or the dragon, or the Way, which wells up and pours through us. There where Tao was, I should like it to be understood, it is my duty that I should come into being. From it, by means of it, and as it.

This staff becomes a dragon. It has swallowed the whole universe. The mountains, rivers, and great earth--where do they come from?

Thank you.