

Good evening, Bodhisattvas.

I'd like to pick up where we ended last night, with *Blue Cliff Record* Case 82:

A student asked Dalong, "The physical body decays. What is the pure everlasting body?"

Dalong said:

Flowers cover the mountains like brocade,
mountain torrents so deep they're indigo.

This short koan feels serene and radiant, and also tender and poignant, opening my heart right up. What's the pure, everlasting body of the dharmakaya, of the vastness? In *this* world at least, it appears only in and as what's always changing, coming into being and fading away. The world of dew.

There's a formulation of this timeless-as-transient paradox in traditional commentary on the koan NO: "in NO there's *no* going and coming; in NO there's *only* going and coming." This is pithy, but doesn't quite conjure up either the sense of deep serenity or the feeling of poignancy that are so palpable in the mountain flowers and torrents so deep they're indigo, images that also embody the mysterious interplay between these apparent contraries of timeless dharmakaya and ceaseless transformation. That intertwining is my subject tonight.

To get rolling, let's jump to another koan, *Blue Cliff Record* 18, Huizhong's Seamless Monument. It puts the poignancy of time and change, of "only going and coming," right up front, since it asks us to contemplate an impending death, as the characters in the koan do:

Emperor Suzong asked National Teacher Huizhong, "What should I do after you die?"

"Build a seamless monument for me," replied the National Teacher.

"What should the monument's design be?"

There was a long silence, and then the National Teacher asked, "Do you understand?"

"No, I don't," said the Emperor.

"What should I do when you die?" Joan's note on the case makes clear that the emperor's question isn't an idle one: he asks it shortly before the national teacher dies. "Build me a seamless monument," the teacher says. What on earth is that? and where should I build it? So, "What should the tomb's design be?" the emperor asks—a reasonable question. No answer, of course (it's a koan, after all). The national teacher just sits in silence, an invitation for the emperor to do the same, to keep him company there. Then after a while: "Do you understand?" Nope, says the emperor.

Well, do we? Or, a better koan question might be: what can we begin to sense, or feel, as we sit there in silence with the teacher? Is it possible this supposedly hypothetical, still-to-be-built-in-the future seamless monument is coming into being already, as we sit together? Or maybe it's already there, or here--or even "always already" there, or here.

This is where individual imagination comes into play, at least in our way of keeping company with koans. What do I see? How does it feel? So: when I spend time with the koan this is where I get a little dreamy. I always imagine a somewhat vague but pretty consistent scenario. I'm not sitting there with the national teacher in a palace, or some little room. We're on a hill, with some vista, so that we're looking out over a landscape that feels expansive. I imagine it, too, as tranquil, countryside not a bustling marketplace. Who knows? But that's how it is for me—maybe because "seamless" suggests something continuous rather than all chopped up, and seems to imply some range or scope, not something pinched or cramped. If all that's plausible, it makes the scene feel tranquil, even as the moment is colored deeply by the pathos of the emperor's question: "what should I do when you die?"

Let's lay this koan down here, for the moment; we'll come back to it in a bit. First, I want to cut to another one. I hope this jumping around ends up making sense to you.

Nobody dies in this other koan. But something appears and then quickly vanishes. Or so it would seem. It's *Blue Cliff Record* Case 53, Ancestor Ma's Duck Flies Away:

Once Ancestor Ma and Baizhang were taking a walk when a wild duck flew by.
"What's that?" asked the Ancestor.
"A wild duck," said Baizhang.
"Where did it go?"
"It flew away."
The Ancestor twisted Baizhang's nose, and Baizhang cried out in pain.
"When did it fly away?" asked the Ancestor.

I've seen another version of the last line that I like a little better, since it's more emphatic: "When did it *ever* fly away?" asked Ancestor Ma.

Well, excuse me, but duh, just now--it did fly away, as Baizhang says. Nothing wrong with that answer. One night in the meditation hall after a talk, David Chadwick asked Suzuki Roshi to please, just once, condense all his teachings into something simple Chadwick could understand. "Everything changes," Suzuki said.

Baizhang said so too. But he gets his nose twisted, hard. Apparently that's not how it is for Great Master Ma, who seizes the chance to help Baizhang join him where he is: "when did it ever fly away?" In No there's only going and coming. But in No there's no going or coming.

Well, maybe. But maybe that's a little hard to see, or feel. How does getting your nose yanked help? In his poem for the case, Xuedo writes:

Baizhang wanted to fly away,
But Mazu held him fast.
Speak! Speak!

That's a start. Centuries later, the Soto teacher Tenkai pitches in, saying about Baizhang:

When he said, "Ouch!" his pulse seemed to appear somewhat. After all, there is nothing outside of knowing that what is painful hurts and knowing that what itches itches. This pain, which has not been received from Buddhas or Zen masters or Mazu either, exists in oneself.

OUCH! Baizhang is suddenly right where he is, in the present, the now. So far so good, and still not super mysterious. But then Tenkai says something stranger: "Now you know the 'ducks' whose essential being has never moved."

This is a little more startling. What suddenly comes forth, immersing us abruptly in the here and now—DUCK! or OUCH!—apparently lets us see and know, and discover ourselves in and as, something timeless and, in that odd Zen sense of the word, eternal. In a different context Uchiyama Roshi, in *Opening the Hand of Thought*, talks about "the present that is only the present, the now that is only now"—just flying duck, or just OUCH, let's say—also declaring, more surprisingly, that when we experience this "now" we also "exist before separating this moment from eternity." Ma's nose twist and that OUCH bring Baizhang abruptly back to right where he is. In his painful nose and his very own body, first off. But also, as I imagine it, into that scene of surrounding field and big sky. There's nothing missing, no place else to be or to think about being; he's just right here now. And how is it, this here and now? Buzzing, silent, flowing, still, vast, eternal, serene--all at once. There's nothing else, nothing falls outside this alive, wide silence and deep stillness cradling what moves. It's always now. When did it ever fly away? Dogen writes: "The entire universe is the deep samadhi of the universe. From the very beginning, nothing has ever fallen out of this samadhi." And as Megan said in her talk last night, more beautifully than I'll manage to put it here, this samadhi is the deepest possible stillness, right at the heart of things--out of which, and as which, everything rolls out and rolls back in again, rising and falling, moving and changing and mysteriously still.

Getting his nose twisted, Baizhang comes into this sense of things suddenly, dramatically. But high drama is by no means requisite. Here's Torei Zenji:

When I look deeply
into the real form of the universe,
everything reveals the mysterious truth of the Tathagata.
This truth never fails:

in every moment and every place
things can't help but shine with this light.

This quiet revelation leads immediately, let's not forget, to what might be called Torei's evocation of the Bodhisattva vow, as a natural response:

Realizing this, our ancestors gave reverent care
to animals, birds, and all beings.
Realizing this, we ourselves know that our daily food,
clothing and shelter are the warm body and beating heart of the Buddha.

So it's an experience with some very human, and humanizing, consequences.

But let's leave Great Master Ma and Baizhang in that field for now; there's an afterward, and we'll come back to it. But what about the national teacher and the emperor?

As they sit there together, I think they're immersed in the world of dew, for sure. The question is how to be there, how to respond. What should I do when you die? Build me a seamless monument, the national teacher says. What should the monument's design be, asks the emperor. And then they lapse into a shared silence. So the national teacher gives the emperor space to contemplate that future time, as they sit there in the quiet landscape, as if the teacher has already died. What should the monument's design be? We're sitting in it already: the world of dew, which breaks your heart. "Impermanence," Katagiri Roshi said, "makes us very quiet."

But that's not all of the story. The trick here is to say the next thing with enough delicacy that it doesn't feel ham fisted. For me, the moment has that same sense of a timeless "now" that the wild duck scene has for Ma and Baizhang. The emperor and national teacher inhabit a quiet stillness that feels a little magical: it holds, in suspension, both the now of their sitting together alive and the now in which the national teacher is already dead—or, it's tempting to say, is always already dead. This interweaving, or fusing, of the two times into each other makes everything feel timeless, lets us sense the eternal aspect that's always already here. The stillness and vastness come up through the landscape and through us, and they're here whether we're here or not, the deep samadhi of the universe, in which all moments are co-present. Which is also the moment of appearing and vanishing, the world of dew: no going and coming, and only going and coming.

What is the pure everlasting body?"
Flowers cover the mountains like brocade,
mountain torrents so deep they're indigo.

You can let it break your heart.

That's what happens to Baizhang.

Joan's version, with an understated tenderness, titles the next part simply "afterward" (it's from Yuanwu's commentary, not from the main case):

The next day, Baizhang opened completely and began weeping. Someone asked him why, and Baizhang told him to ask Ma. Ma sent him back to Baizhang, who was now laughing uproariously. "You were just crying; why are you laughing now?" Baizhang replied, "I was crying before; now I'm laughing."

Which is all of the story. Baizhang opens completely, not when his nose gets tweaked, not when he comes right up into that eternal now, though that sets things in motion. But the full effect of it takes some time to ripple and spread through him. When it does, his response is maybe not what we'd expect. Why is he crying? Partly, perhaps, these are tears of relief: released from separateness and alienation; at home in myself, and in the world, at last. But I think there's something else. "Where did it go?" "It flew away." And it did. "If you observe this case with the correct eye," Yuanwu writes in his commentary, "unexpectedly it's Baizhang who has the correct basis." But then Yuanwu seems to contradict himself, praising Ma for the nose twist that abruptly shifts Baizhang's perspective. So who's right? Well, exactly so. The national teacher dies, everything rises and falls, each thing that comes forth sinks down and the wide, vast ocean rolls over it. But the seamless monument is also always here, and we're sitting in it together, in a moment that's also timeless. "Do you understand?" We can hold them both. And they hold us. And there isn't any more logic to it than that, any way to sort out or untangle or separate one from the other, to clutch the vast and eternal part so it keeps us safe, so it saves us from "what should I do when you die?" It's not a get out of jail free card I can stick in my pocket. There's something beautiful and tender about Baizhang's very simple response—both unhelpful and entirely helpful—when his questioner presses him for a little more clarity:

"You were just crying; why are you laughing now?" Baizhang replied, "I was crying before; now I'm laughing."

It's the way it is because it's the way it is; I'm responding the way I am because I'm responding the way I am, to this tangle, moment by moment. Laughing doesn't supersede crying, or solve it. Sometimes I cry, sometimes I laugh; that's all--both of them acknowledging and accepting all of it. "With equanimity," Joan says, "you let everything in at the gate; and then you feel what you feel." She liked to tell a story about our dharma ancestor, a couple transmission generations back. After a big opening, Yamada lay with his head in his teacher Yasutani's lap, weeping. Yasutani—who, as Joan noted, could be pretty fierce--just kept stroking Yamada's head, saying "I understand, I understand." "That's a tradition," Joan said, "I'm happy to belong to."

So Baizhang's weeping, I think, doesn't just open him up, it opens him out. In retreat, Joan used to say, quoting the tradition, we're companions of one another's solitude. Not only in

retreat, of course. And we can accent the phrase either way: we're companions of one another's *solitude*; and also, we're *companions* of one another's solitude.

The cycle of Dongshan's Five positions comes to rest right here, evoking an ancient, familiar, communal scene:

Who dares to reconcile with not falling into being or non-being?
People yearn with all their hearts to leave the constant flux;
transform this and return to sit by the charcoal fire.

So here we are.