

## A Life of Practice

### Chapter V

On a sunny September day I made my way to Tahoma Monastery on Whidbey Island. This was the very first sesshin to be held at Tahoma. Ten years previously Harada Roshi was asked to lead a sesshin at Cloud Mountain Retreat Center which is in the mountains of South Western Washington. With this retreat he started cultivating students from this region. Eventually he and his students purchased some property and started building Tahoma. Now as I write this another ten years later we are building his retirement home and we hope he will shortly be residing at Tahoma on something close to a full time basis. Presently Harada is abbot of Sogenji Monastery in Okayama Japan, one of the few Zen training monasteries in Japan filled with mostly western monks.

There were fifty participants in the sesshin. In the Zendo I sat next to Neils, near the end of one of the center rows. Niels had done a couple other sesshins with Harada. There were also a couple other participants from our little Port Townsend sangha.

I thought of that first sesshin with Sazaki Roshi and realized that if I was to get anything out of this sesshin and truly renew my realization I would have to put everything I have into the practice, not to waste a moment, not to sleep through periods, not to let my mind drift, but to sit straight and focus all my attention on my breath and the count. Harada also told me not to lose awareness for even a moment. Of course this was not possible. There were times I drifted off into thought and there were times where the pain in my knees was so great that my only escape was to drift into semi-consciousness. But still I put everything I could into zazen whether on or off the cushion and it paid off.

The sesshin was like a fabulous roller coaster ride ranging from periods of no thought to periods of almost frenetic thought and insight, from periods of deep serenity to periods of deep emotions. This is very difficult to describe but the roller coaster is a good analogy. The ride started with the effort put into zazen. Slowly the first hill is climbed. Concentrating on the breath counting each one from one to ten, cutting out all other thoughts and distractions slowly the mind quiets, concentration deepens, and this strange energy we call chi seems to grow. The chi can be experienced in many ways. It might be experienced as a sense of tightness in the face or the stomach, or a strong feeling of pressure or warmth at one of the chakra points. We can also feel the chi in the intensity of our awareness and concentration. As I approached the top of the hill my awareness felt like a hot knife cutting through butter. All that existed was the count and the feeling of the breath and a little self aware effort. And then I just disappeared. Actually as I remember it this the first time did not happen in the zendo but after zazen I was walking back to my camp practicing the awareness of my visual field without attaching to any individual objects. Just trying to see the whole visual field from periphery to the center as a single object I didn't disappear for a long time, maybe just a few moments but then something happened. Similarly to what happened at that Sesshin with Sazaki when I was listening to the whole audio field, now each object that drew attention seemed like a jewel of immense beauty and I thought "How wonderful that the ancestors have passed on this experience through the generations." And I was flooded by

a feeling of love. I thought of Sasaki Roshi and tears started to role down my cheeks. For over a day the only way I could hold back the tears was to stop thinking by practicing Zazen. Eventually my emotional energy drained.

This emotional energy is just another manifestation of chi but now it is being released and down I go on the roller coaster. At the bottom of the hill my mind starts racing gain and my knees and back are hurting again, but I feel great and I start climbing the hill again. Again my mind quiets and now when I release the energy again I am filled with joy and love and the deep understanding that I am the Universe become self conscious. Eventually ego based thinking resumes and I become just Ed again. So up I climb the hill again and again become the Universe and realize that this very process of again and again returning to this place is the very process of practice and that it will eventually purify out the ego so that I continuously see with the eyes of the Universe. Actually as Harada once told me “Life is too short to completely purify the mind.”

As I have told this story earlier I repeat it to emphasize the nature of the process and talk more about chi. This path or process we call Buddhism is not an easy road. These dramatic experiences I am recounting are the results of years of diligent practice. I had daily practiced meditation for eight years and been to several retreats as well as being intellectually immersed in a spiritual search before I passed that first Koan. And it was another twenty years before I had the experiences I am now recounting.

This path is about throwing the ego away. Most people want to reinforce their ego. They want to feel good about themselves in their ego. But we Buddhists try to do the opposite, get rid of the ego. As beginners we can only throw the ego away in small ways. In daily life we can choose to ignore ego based desires attachments and aversions, or we can forget ourselves in activity. A beginner when sitting also tries to throw away the ego by immersion in the activity of meditation, at first through the effort of concentration and attention. All of this activity is designed to break the habit of ego based dualistic thought. Eventually with success we start to experience periods where our mind quiets and our ego based thinking stops. Because our thinking happens at many levels some of which are unconscious a few moments without verbal thought does not really end our ego based thinking, it just allows these deeper levels of thought, some of which are verbal and some of which are imagination based and some of which are emotional, come to the surface. Only when all these different layers are penetrated through, is ego based thought stopped.

When our thinking stops even for a moment then there is the potential for the awakening of a whole new way of thinking about the world, a way without ego, but this generally does not happen so easily. But something else does happen, there is an accumulation of chi. Think of chi as nervous system energy. Our chi exists in a balance between accumulation and use, generally existing in a certain range. We accumulate chi when we rest and relax, and use it up in activity. When we feel bright and awake we have a relatively large amount of chi functioning. When we are tired and our head gets fuzzy there is much less chi functioning. But, if we stop thinking the balance of chi is thrown off, we start accumulating chi faster then it is used. With accumulating chi concentration grows stronger and stronger until you are deep in samadhi. Not even a trace of self remains. Maybe even awareness shuts down.

And then something happens, maybe a noise, or maybe a thought about a koan rises into consciousness. And then all that chi that has been accumulating activates our

psycho-physical system which is described as the chakras. If the chi goes all the way to the head then we will experience deep insight, maybe pass a koan, maybe have a completely mind blowing insight into the non-dual nature of reality, or maybe have a slightly less dramatic peek into non-dual reality. Maybe the chi doesn't make it all the way to the head and open up a great insight but instead activates the lower chakras and we are flooded with a feeling of love. And maybe if enough chi is accumulated all the chakras are activated and we are filled with both love and insight. Eventually the emotional and or intellectual energy subsides, and we are any longer in samadhi.

If this experience results in insight into non-duality, then this is an Enlightenment experience and you will find yourself a deeply changed person. Though whether it is a small or a large kensho we should not sit on our laurels but again climb the mountain again and ride the roller coaster down the hill.. This is what my experience has shown is the Zen way.

Each time I climbed the mountain at this sesshin it was less and less difficult and each time I rode the roller coaster down the hill I traveled a shorter distance down, until by the last day I was in continuous samadhi. I camped one last night at Tahoma and woke up in samadhi. Late in the morning I headed back home. Unlike driving around Vancouver after the sesshin with Sazaki I did not feel like a race car driver, I actually found it very difficult. Driving straight down the road was fine though my perception of speed seemed to be a little distorted but then when something came up that needed a little extra concentration like stopping or turning, I would disappear, the intensity of my concentration was so great, my conscious awareness would turn off. Luckily these episodes would last just a moment. I made it home safely.

Katsuki Sekida in his book Zen Training writes about this very deep Samadhi where conscious awareness turn off. He calls this Absolute Samadhi. In Absolute Samadhi there is not even a trace of a self aware I and even the short term memory, that allows one to be self reflective after the event, is turned off. Sekida places a strong emphasis on this type of samadhi. He calls this absolute samadhi a “readjustment of nervous activity.” and writes about it as though this is what Zen is all about. My experience tells me something else. As I have described I have had some experiences with Absolute Samadhi. They have been to me some very important experiences, though of course you never really experience absolute samadhi except as a black hole in memory. But this Absolute Samadhi is not the Buddha's Samadhi. Shakimuni called himself The Awakened One, The Buddha, not because his awareness had gone black but because he experienced a deep awareness, a deep awakensness, and not as an individual but awakensness in non-duality. Absolute Samadhi is a gate it is a gate of Zen but it may not be the only gate and it is not what is on the other side of the gate.

The hallmark of Enlightenment in the Zen School is kensho, experiencing the True Self. For me this experience first happened at the sesshin in 1980 with Sazaki. It happened after a moment of Absolute Samadhi when I understood that because for that moment of Absolute Samadhi everything that I could call my self was turned off and therefor not permanent and that I as an individual was a sort of fiction, my whole dualistic way of thinking just fell away, and then I realized that the True Self included the whole Universe (Large Self). This is just an idea but in a more personal way there was also the recognition that in that state of mind in meditation where the world is not being

divided up into this and that and the personal I (small self) is forgotten we are in direct experience of everything experienced without boundaries as the True Self. This is Buddha's samadhi. I hope this last convoluted statement is understandable.

Now the reader might question how we can experience anything without a personal self doing the experiencing. But this is certainly not true because the "I" which we carry around in our thoughts is just a habit and not necessary for the mechanism we call "experiencing" which involves perception, memory, and reflection. If you think reflection necessarily involves the individual small self I you are again wrong. The small self I is just something we carry around in our thoughts. After Kensho another "I" grows in our thoughts and this is the I of the Large Self and now a whole new way of thinking is possible but it is not your thought it is Buddha's thought and there usually isn't much of what we call thought to it accept the activity of the Universe, Buddha's activity, as reflected in Buddha's mind which is Buddha's thought. It is only because we divide the world up into inner and outer, me and you, subject and object, that we don't see it.

With kensho a new type of samadhi becomes possible. This samadhi is not black but clear and bright. It is intelligent and loving humorous and sad and it contains a bit of self awareness but it is not the small I's self awareness it is Buddha's self awareness. It is when the chi functions freely. This is called prajna (enlightened wisdom) and as the Sixth Patriarch of Zen said "prajna and samadhi cannot be separated."

At this first sesshin with Harada Roshi each Time I went through the door of Absolute Samadhi for a time I emerged in this world of the Buddha's Samadhi. And then it would dissipate. Each time it dissipated and I reentered the world of hyperactive thought and painful knees I wondered if I would ever return to that magical place. With effort I did and I did this again and again three or four times, each time the Buddha's samadhi lasting a little bit longer until it lasted a couple of days beyond the sesshin.

At home I felt like a live wire. Chi was still coursing through my body. I could feel the vibration of the chi. In time it dissipated. For a while each time I sat zazen my mind would quiet and I could feel the chi build up and I would enter samadhi but not a deep samadhi and it would not last long. In the evenings I sat then I wrote. It was very joyous and moving. I was again filled with the insight that had disappeared during my four or five year hiatus from sitting and it was maybe deeper then it had ever been. Every where I looked everything I heard, tasted, touched and smelled was Buddha. And I also was Buddha. During the day I worked but also chanted Om Mani Padme Hum much of the time. When walking when driving a car I would enter meditation and quiet my mind.

Our individual minds are very sticky. The life of samsara, the life of most of us, the life of suffering and joy, the life of dualism is likened to walking a dusty road. This dust, our everyday concerns, our deep attachments, all those multiple layers of thought and emotion are the layers of dirt that have built up on our minds obscuring our vision, our inherent wisdom, prajna. All this dust must be cleaned off if we are to enter deep samadhi. Even if once cleaned off our minds still remain sticky. Even if cleaned off and deep insight experienced, it still remains sticky. Maybe not as sticky, because the adhesive is our dualistic way of thinking, but this dualistic way of thinking is a very strongly ingrained habit, and maybe a very important habit for our functioning in the everyday world. This is why the practitioner can not sit back on the laurels of an Enlightenment experience or even several Enlightenment experiences but must continue to practice. This is also why though I practiced meditation daily, the clarity and depth of

samadhi experienced during sesshin slowly dissipated. Each Time I sat I first had to clean off the accumulated dust, the accumulated daily concerns before, my mind would quiet and enter samadhi.

The next Sesshin six months later was a completely different affair. There really was no question of whether I wanted or should go to the next sesshin. I went and right away when I entered sanzen the Roshi asked me if I had stopped thinking. I could only answer that there were times I wasn't thinking and there were times my knees hurt. Yes I could stop thinking through effort for short bits of time but I had not entered that effortless quiet space that is deep samadhi. I was also not having any strong experiences of chi. Harada talked a lot at this sesshin about chi. He said that a true zen person must always be taut with chi. He said we were like balloons filling with chi. With each breath we quiet our minds for a moment and add one drop of chi until we are taut with chi. I wasn't sure what he meant by taut. Though I put all my effort into zazen nothing dramatic happened. Slowly my mind cleared.. I started to feel like I was sitting well. In sanzen Harada asked me, "what is good zazen ?" Since I felt like I was experiencing good zazen right that moment and my mind was quiet I did not verbally respond but gestured to say that good zazen encompassed everything. He did not respond then but at the next sanzen he said that good sanzen was when one was completely aware of every "mind moment". I took this to heart and sat with my eyes wide open and when I could no longer hold my awareness and my vision distorted I just blinked a few times and refocused.. At first when I lost awareness for a moment I would drift into a dreamlike space but eventually when I lost awareness I found myself chanting to myself.. Now I was really sitting well and I could feel the chi as Harada described as a sort of pressure giving the skin on my face a taut feeling. But still nothing dramatic happened until the evening of the sixth day.

The bell rang to end a period. The sound penetrated right to my stomach it was so intensely sweet that it was almost unbearable. When the four bells rang again to start the next period again every sound seemed intensely beautiful. The soft shuffle of feet of the person carrying the kjosaku stick and then the wack wack was wonderful, the cracks and creeks of trees moving in the wind, the swish of passing cars, the bang of the Han ending the evenings sit, each sound penetrating to the core, were all a heavenly symphony, Nirvana.

At my next sanzen Harada asked again, "Have you stopped thinking?" "Yes!" "How does it manifest?" "Each sound is like a dewdrop from heaven." He then told me two things; One, that I needed to get good at not thinking and Two that my breath would get deeper as my practice deepened..

Shodo Harada Roshi is a Rinzi master. That puts him in the lineage of the great 17<sup>th</sup> Century Japanese master Hakuin who reformed Rinzi Zen and set up the Rinzi curriculum of koan practice. Sazaki Roshi and Genki Roshi were both koan teachers and I worked on koans with both but Harada chose not to work on koans with me. Instead at the next sesshin, September 2001 he started working with me on a breathing technique. The technique is very simple, smooth long out breaths that go right down to the bottom of the breath where every last drop of air is expelled from the lungs. Of course I was to be mindful of my breathing but also be mindful of my stomach area which is called the

Hara in Japanese and translates to “Heart Center.” It is the stomach chakra that is the energetic center of the body.

I had discovered a similar but different technique many years ago where, as my zazen deepened I would settle into breathing very little down at the bottom of my breath. It both promoted a quiet mind and resulted from a quiet mind. But here Harada wanted me to take full slow breaths one after another each time reaching the bottom. This may seem simple but like much in zen it is deceptively difficult. This can only be done successfully if the mind is quiet and perfectly relaxed. A single thought can cut the breath short. Without being relaxed the breath will stop short of the bottom and reach a seemingly impenetrable barrier. Even if you get to the bottom and you push it a little too much and hold your breath a little too long the next breath will again stop short. At first it may seem that you truly get to the bottom with one in ten breaths, then one in five breaths. Eventually you settle into being able to do it on most breaths but now you have to present your technique in front of the teacher. Each time I went in front of the teacher I gave a long slow breath. At first I wasn't able to expel every last drop of air in Harada's presence. I would push but it just wouldn't happen. I was told to be gentle.

I was still a little nervous before I went into sanzen. As I sat waiting my turn I would anticipate the exchange and my heart would start to pump hard and race a bit. If I concentrated on my stomach area really feeling the pit of the stomach as I breathed I could get my heart to slow down. What was interesting is that sometimes this problem would get worse during the sesshin rather than better. Also I started experiencing this racing heart outside of the sesshin at home and work. I identified the problem as a chi phenomena. I was thinking that since I had started doing sesshins with Harada I was functioning with more and more chi and this was the result. I went into sanzen during my third or fourth sesshin with Harada and started my breath. Before I had expelled all the air a thought interrupted my concentration and I felt my heart start to speed up. I said to Harada, “Sometimes the chi is in my stomach and some times it rises.” He quickly responded, “If you know this you know a lot.” Then he talked a little about how the Chi rises through the center of the body and then ended by saying that the instability of the chi will eventually end and the chi will settle in the stomach.

I was becoming more and more conscious of chi. I often had a strong sensation of it as I meditated and often even when not meditating. By the end of sesshin I would be so filled with chi that I would shake and not be able to sleep for more than a couple hours during the night. I understood the process of building up chi until I was full and then letting it drain to produce insight and a feeling of bliss. Over a period of several sesshins I developed enough control of this process that I would have one or more of these experiences every day.

At the same time I was working on the breathing technique. This breathing technique is especially good at building up chi but I still had not mastered it. When I found it was not working I just went to one of my other techniques. I was more interested in being in samadhi than any one technique to get there. Still every time I went to see Harada I gave my breath. If I could enter sanzen in samadhi with a still mind and hold that still mind through the breath, then the breath would be long and deep. This was certainly not easy. How could I not think as I walked into the sanzen room? As I sat on the porch waiting for the gong that signals my turn I put everything I had into my zazen often quieting the mind and entering samadhi. But then as I walked to the cabin or did

my prostrations I would start thinking. I tried various things from reciting a mantra during the walk to running to the cabin but usually that first breath was strained and hesitant. But then as the sanzen proceeded I would settle into samadhi and always feel like I had a deep experience.

After two or three sesshins working on this breathing technique, at the very beginning of one sesshin I gave a breath that was slow long and smooth, lasting until every drop of air was expelled. He accepted this breath but then as the sesshin continued I found it harder and harder to maintain this smooth breath. I could get down to the bottom of the breath but it wasn't smooth. I wasn't sure what was going on. Harada didn't seem to mind that my breath had lost its smoothness. Though I felt calm and aware with few thoughts. I thought that maybe I was subconsciously nervous but then I realized that my breath was literally shaking with chi.

This breathing practice of Sokusan serves multiple purposes. For Harada it is a way to test his students for their state of mind. Are they in samadhi or not? How deep is their samadhi? But more importantly it is a way to quickly enter samadhi. With this technique it is possible to enter samadhi with a single breath. And once in samadhi it can be quickly deepened. There is also a quick accumulation of chi with this technique. When I entered sanzen I continued to give a single breath and Harada would also give a breath before he began talking. For a long time I thought he was just demonstrating the technique but then I realized that he was also using it to enter or deepen samadhi to begin the sanzen.

Harada has always been nothing but complimentary to my practice. Only once did he chastise me and this was during the first sesshin when I let my mind get completely carried away by the wonderful insights I was having. After this chastisement I realized that sanzen was a place to meet in samadhi, not a place for an intellectual exchange. I always tried to bring into sanzen whatever samadhi I could muster. Harada recognized this and told me he thought I had been working with samadhi for at least ten years.

Now we enter the fog of multiple sesshins. I continued to do two sesshins a year with Harada Roshi. In my memory they have lost their distinctness though I have distinct memory of certain individual events. I was not given a koan or any easily definable practice, yet each sesshin, at the first sanzen, he would give me a focus or direction. One sesshin he just told me to have fun.. At one sesshin he told me to keep attention on the breath and not direct attention to sounds. He said that if you let sounds come to you and not you go to the sounds they will be fresher. At another sesshin he told me to die with every breath. At still another sesshin he told me to become the whole Universe with every breath.

Somewhere in here he told me that he thought I had mastered not thinking but that the Buddha did not teach to not think any thought at all, rather to not be attached to any thought. This statement is a possible motivation for much thought but I understood right away what he meant because I had already given the question of thought much thought. So let me give you some of my thoughts on this matter. Actually this is a bit of a controversy in the Buddhist world. Some people think that Enlightenment is just some sort of magical intellectual insight and with this insight one enters a state of non-attachment to the ultimate importance of anything, and thereby gains a sort of freedom, and meditation becomes of minimal importance. Others think that to purify the mind of all thought is the essence of meditation and Enlightenment. And there are all sorts of

positions in between. Though I have talked about and debated this question with several people this is not a question for debate but something to be understood through meditation.

Of deep importance is the question, what is the essence of attachment? Is it just that underlying importance we assign to specific objects and thoughts and events. Is it the habitual patterns of thoughts and emotions that run through our mind and bodies. The practice of non-attachment is fundamental for Buddhists. I was once confronted by a fellow Buddhist who asked if it was even possible to be completely unattached. Was not attachment to non-attachment always going to remain. My reply was that non-attachment is quite possible, there are simply states of mind where there is attachment and states of mind where there is no attachment. To practice non-attachment from within a state of mind of attachment, which is our normal ego driven state of mind, can never quite rid one of attachment as my friend believed. This is only a sort of preliminary practice. It is to enter that state of complete non-attachment where the true essence of Buddhism is glimpsed.

In the deepest sense attachment is not what we normally think it as, the assignment of importance to a thought or object. We think we are attached to something when we want or desire it. And we certainly have attachment to ideas such as our religious and political ideas. But in its deepest sense attachment is the attachment of one thought to the next with all its emotional coloring. If we watch our minds we can see how this process works. In meditation we can see how a single thought can carry us along into a long strings of thoughts and emotions, dulling the clarity of our awareness. This type of attachment is a habit but it is also intimately connected to our whole way of thinking and is not separate from desire, aversion, fear, etc.. The Buddha Shakyamuni also realized that this attachment of thought was responsible for our dualistic view of the world and tried to show how this works with what he called the Twelve Fold Chain of Interdependent Origination. I don't want to go into the specifics if this idea accept to say that this chain, this attachment of one thought to the next needs to be cut if we are to break free of dualistic thought. As you probably see now my argument is leading to the importance of not thinking. Not the not thinking where everything goes black but the not thinking where everything is bright and clear, where one is placed smack in the non-dualistic world of Buddha. Not thinking is the path to the non-dual but once in the non-dual does there have to be no thought?. Sure, there can be thinking in the non-dual, all thought, like everything else, is fundamentally embedded in non-duality. But practically speaking with more than a little thought the awareness of non-duality disappears and again you will be thrown out of the Garden of Eden.. In Zen practice again and again we drop our thinking and return to Buddha. We have to do this both to pass through that gate-less gate of samadhi so that we may again and again experience Buddha and become skilled at having this experience, and also so that we can bring the understanding of the non-dual out into our daily lives.

So what is non-attachment in thought? In the realm of samadhi thought without attachment is a thought or a small group of thoughts that is not preceded by a long line of thought and not followed by a thought. If we liken samadhi to a clear blue sky then an unattached thought is like a small puff of cloud that does not at all obscure the deep blue. It quickly passes and leaves a blue sky from horizon to horizon.



If the sky is completely covered with thought,  
will we remember the azure clarity of our freedom,  
will we remember the 84,000 stars of our mind?

And there are thoughts which inherently recognize the non-dual; thoughts of insight which arise out of the depths of meditation. And there are thoughts of the heart, intimacy, love and compassion. freed from attachment to specific individuals. And there are the 1001 everyday thoughts which direct our functioning, tell us to put on a hat when it is cold, and to help a friend in need. Why should any of these thoughts be a problem, as long as they don't obscure Buddha.

We Buddhists say that the essential problem being our dualistic view of life and cause of suffering, is "ignorance." If we truly understand our true nature and the true nature of the world then we naturally become free from suffering. I don't think so. The essential problem is not just an intellectual ignorance but an ignorance which is much deeper with roots which are genetic and strengthened by years of habitual energy. Even if one has a deep Enlightenment experience this is only the beginning of a process of deepening. My experience is that if this deepening process is neglected then one is likely to return fully to dualistic thought with only a distant memory of the experience of the non-dual. This process of deepening is simply going back again and again to that place which at various times I have called samadhi, the non-dual, kensho, Buddha, the Enlightenment experience.

It is always that first Enlightenment experience which is most difficult. Through years of practice in meditation we may experience samadhi, stop our thoughts and dive into the non-dual and still not recognize the essential nature of this experience. After I had been doing sesshins with Harada for four or five years I was in sanzen and he says to me that several of his students are on the edge of having an Enlightenment experience but it just isn't happening. He asked me for advice and all I could say is "it is very difficult." "Of course it is difficult", he acknowledged but he was not really interested in continuing the conversation, it was his problem not mine.

For there to be a true Enlightenment experience there has to be a joining of intellect and samadhi. This intellectual half of the equation is called prajna (wisdom). Even if one has had a particularly enjoyable experience with samadhi without the intellectual component the roots, our deep attachment to our dualistic ego based view of life, will not be cut. This essential insight is not very complex. It is not like figuring out calculus but it does go against our whole way of thinking about things. It might be a relatively shallow realization like the experience I had on the bluff overlooking the Straits of Georgia before I correctly answered my first koan or I might be a much deeper realization like my experience of answering my second koan.. But with a single realization now every time samadhi is entered the non-dual becomes apparent and realization deepens. It is like recognizing a special medicinal plant that had been previously described to us only in words. For a long time when we walked through the woods we did not recognize the plant though it was before our eyes. But then one day we make the connection between the description we had heard and the plant before our eyes and now every time we walk in the woods we recognize the plant. We should not separate realization from samadhi

because only in samadhi can we clearly experience the non-dual. It is a mistake to think that kensho will happen out side of the quiet mind of samadhi, that some how we will experience Enlightenment through a purely intellectual process. It is like searching for that special plant in the sunny fields when its natural habitat is the woods

If I may get back to my story, after three or four year of practice doing sesshins with Harada I was getting quite good at entering samadhi having a realization of the non-dual and become completely blissed out. I didn't need to be in the environment of a sesshin. I was working on the road in the San Francisco area and on a weekend I took a drive to visit a friend. As I drove I meditated using a mantra. When I discovered my friend wasn't home I turned toward the coast and continued the drive. All of a sudden I could feel the chi rise. It filled me up and then spilled into joy. In an instant the whole Universe had become Buddha. Needless to say it was a fun drive.

I was sitting zazen on the porch under a star filled sky waiting for sanzen when the beauty of the scene filled me. The whole Universe the sights the sounds the feel of my body entered me all at once. This was different. Up to this point my gateway into samadhi was concentration. I would focus attention on my breath, a specific sound, or even just a single sense field like sight or sound until thought stopped. For a moment I might even disappear into a specific sensation then the chi would spill and I would have my little ride filled with joy and insight. This new experience was the opposite of focused attention and I didn't enter samadhi with a specific sound, nor did I spill any chi. All the barriers were down and I was fully conscious. I just sat there in the center of Buddha. I went into sanzen and Harada noticed that something was different and told me that I was experiencing Ocean King Samadhi. After sanzen as I walked down the hill to the Zendo the chi finally spilled and my whole body filled with a sensation of pure bliss for a minute or so and then was gone.

For the next sesshin or two I thought I might re-experience this sensation of bliss but I didn't. I realized that I had grown attached to the joy and insight experienced when chi was spilled and I had grown quite proficient at making this happen. I realized that I was wasting the chi. And I had had enough intellectual insights. There was no need to further intellectualize the experience of samadhi. I had collected enough intellectual nuggets. I just needed to continue to deepen the experience of samadhi.

Now when I felt the chi rise I just kept my focus and kept my mind quiet and the joyful feeling of chi would quickly dissipate. Before long I was off the chi roller coaster. In some way going to retreat, meditating for long hours, and filling up with chi is about training the body and mind to accept more and more chi. At first when you fill up with chi the body and mind has difficulty holding a lot of chi and it is easily spilled but as the body-mind learns to accommodate greater and greater amounts of chi the meditation experience seems to smooth out. Every time a large amount of chi is spilled samadhi is eventually lost but without the spilling of chi the experience of samadhi would last for greater and greater lengths of time. But also the nature of samadhi seemed to change. Now I was experiencing more and more of that samadhi which Harada called Ocean King Samadhi.

I now rarely experience those periods of Absolute Samadhi where everything goes dark. For a while I thought that maybe I was growing lazy in my Zazen. But now I understand this to not be the case. Absolute Samadhi is a passage to a deeper samadhi. Some times it is called the Great Death but it is only the Great Death if when we

reemerge only Buddha is present and the small I is gone. Most likely the small I will reemerge and We must die over and over again. But eventually the small I and the large I seem to merge and consciousness is fully present in samadhi. The deepest samadhi is not dark but light. Let me describe what I think is the deepest samadhi. In this samadhi the mind is quiet but not necessarily totally quiet. An occasional thought is possible but it is not followed by other attached thoughts. There is complete awareness. All the boundaries are down all the filters are non functional all the sensations are present in consciousness. There is even the presence of Self consciousness, but this Self is not the self of Ed Haber existing as a single mind existing in a single body. It is certainly not the self of the ever present "I". This Self doesn't even need to think about itself. It just knows that it is and that it is everything, the whole shebang, the whole Universe, and I don't mean just this Universe which Scientists think is only twelve to fourteen billion years old, but the UNIVERSE that includes all Universes. Simultaneously there is also the awareness of the small individual "I". In this samadhi insight and everyday understanding is present just below the surface of thought, unspoken, but ready to make its appearance if the situation calls it forth. This samadhi is clear and bright. This is Ocean King Samadhi. When I sit in this samadhi this body, this mind, becomes an organ of awareness for the Universal I. When I function in this samadhi this mind, this body, is the functioning of the Universal I.. Ocean King samadhi is simply a joyful clear quiet mind. This is now the samadhi which I practice.

Our story is about to come to a close. In 2007 Harada Roshi told me that my formal training was over and that I could teach Zen... After the sesshin where this happened I was still uncertain about how I was to take the role of being a teacher. Didn't I need some sort of credential like being a recognized Dharma Heir, or going through a formal ceremony and receiving the title Sensei or Roshi? Did I need more training so that I could take on the role of a priest? Many of the lineages of Zen that have taken root in the United States have developed a formality for passing on the permission to teach. Was I to start teaching in Harada's organization? I emailed Harada with these concerns and in response he wrote that I did not need more training, that I was qualified to teach, and that neither the Buddha nor Bodhidharma had credentials. I obviously was going to have to figure this out on my own. As I write this I still live in Port Townsend and teach a small group of Zen practitioners.

Now as I whined this story down I ask some questions. What is the outcome of all this meditation and all these experiences? How have I changed? Does Enlightenment really live up to it's reputation? What exactly does it mean to be Enlightened?

Back in 1980 after having that first deep experience I was filled with love and joy and confidence. All my anxieties just seemed to be gone. I was also very conscious of being "Enlightened." Though I felt this experience was very special for myself I never really felt like this experience made me special. If anything the insight that there was no substantial basis for my individuality seemed to put a check on too much ego gratification. And if this insight did not keep me in my place my wife Janet certainly did. I was not immune to the travails of marriage.

Enlightenment is advertised to end suffering and make one forever happy and maybe even joyful. One should never fully believe an advertisement. Since I had been a relatively happy person Enlightenment did not make me a substantially happier person after the initial bliss of the experience wore off. But there were some differences. In

the past where I might be turned from happiness and become upset for several days, now all I needed to do is sit down and meditate to and drop whatever was making me unhappy and return to a state of happiness. Also my happiness is based upon something different. Before, I would be happy playing sports, or thinking philosophy, or being with friends. Generally speaking activities whether physical or mental made me happy. After this first Enlightenment experience I had an overall sense of happiness based upon the understanding that as a individual I am fully part of the natural world but also I am also not just a part but the whole Universe become self conscious.. I just look out at a the world with this understanding and feel a deep sense of joy. This happiness just seems to be my natural state and there is no need to go looking for happiness. But this is not to say that events cannot make me sad or concerned or even angry but underneath there is still happiness.

There is a story about a Zen master Zuigon who every day sat on a rock and told himself to not become confused.. Even in a monastic setting Zuigon found it necessary to remind himself to not forget his practice and not forget his understanding so that he would not fall into his old dualistic ego centered thought patterns. If it is possible with a Zen master how much more so for a person with a single deep Enlightenment experience married, raising a family, and working a job. This Enlightenment business is not about sitting on your laurels but takes constant practice. The habits of dualistic ego centered thought are very strong. Maybe thinking of ego based thought as just habit is not correct because the root of this type of thought is in our genetics and our physiology. The root is in our bodies drive to survive and reproduce. But even so, amazingly humans have the potential and capacity to experience the world in a completely different way, without ego and without dualism. In today's world, ironically, this Enlightened way of seeing the world may be even more important for our survival then our ego based survival oriented way of thinking.

After the first Enlightenment experience, for me one thing that changed was motivation. I had always been interested in abstract thought, and had studied science philosophy, and mathematics in college. I was not a loner and had always had strong friendships and you might say that I was always empathetic in my politics, but I held the ideal of being a solitary abstract thinker delving into the mysteries of the Universe. I viewed meditation as one leg of my philosophic quest. But after this first Enlightenment experience I found that my primary motivation was to help people. I lost that attraction to being a solitary abstract thinker. That first experience seemed to fill me with love and though in day to day life it was not always sustained, deep meditation would renew the feeling. I felt an intimacy with everything. The plants, animals, insects, mountains, and other people, we are all parts of one life.

Beings are numberless, I vow to liberate them.

Desires are inexhaustible., I vow to put an end to them.

The Dharmas are boundless, I vow to master them.

The Buddhas way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it.

These are the vows of the Bodhisattva. Anybody can become a Bodhisattva by just taking these vows with true intention. Yet for most of us to take these vows, does not make us significantly less self centered. But with a single Enlightenment experience

something happens, an individual can not help but become a Bodhisattva. They have seen through their individuality and no longer give it much credence. This doesn't mean that the individual knows exactly how to go about being a Bodhisattva but never the less the motivation will be there.

I think it is important that we understand our motivations in life. Of course we are all pulled towards what we think might actually give us joy and happiness. But just as important as our pull towards enjoyment is our repulsion away from things which we perceive as a threat to ourselves, those we love, and generally what we are attached to as important. This is generally the emotion of fear though sometimes it manifests as other emotions such as anger, greed, sadness and hate. This spectrum of negative emotions are all rooted in attachment, and manifest in the larger category of suffering. But the really deep root, the foundation, for all these emotions is our whole view of the world as divided up into me and you, this and that, good and bad, love and hate life and death.. This is the world of duality.

What would happen if we could drop our dualistic view of the world, if there was no longer a me and a you nor life and death? What would happen if we saw everything as a single life? Would all our negative emotions be gone? Would we no longer fear? Imagine life without fear. Would our fears be replaced by love and compassion? This is the world of non-duality, Nirvana

With a single deep Enlightenment experience Nirvana is just glimpsed, though with just a glimpse our life has changed the foundation has crumbled. We might still fear but we know there is no reason to fear. We might still get angry but we cannot hold on to it. We might still desire but it doesn't really matter if we get what we desire. In some strange way we seem to be happy though we can simultaneously experience a deep sorrow due to the tragedies of life. Now compassion and love seem to flow much more freely and have become the primary motivations for our actions yet we do not become attached to the outcome of our actions. This is the life of the Bodhisattva.

At the beginning of our practice when we first take the Bodhisattva vows with true intention we conceive ourselves as Bodhisattvas but only upon that first Enlightenment experience are we truly reborn as a Bodhisattva. Being reborn as a Bodhisattva is only the beginning of a long development process, a process which lasts the rest of the persons life. Developing as a Bodhisattva is simply to continue Buddhist practice. Very quickly a Bodhisattva after their initial experience will realize their own inadequacy finding they are still prone to the many travails of human life. He/she will recognize the importance of returning to that world of non-duality to renew and cultivate that view which makes one a Bodhisattva. This is what I have experienced in my practice.

For years after my initial enlightenment experience I was unable to pass any more koans and then I stopped going to retreats but I continued my daily practice. Though I did not have any more deep Enlightenment experiences, most of the times I sat in meditation I was able to clear away my thoughts and experience some time in samadhi and renew my vision of the world. It was only after a prolonged period without meditation that I saw, that special vision which I had worked so hard to gain and then maintain, slowly fade.

When I returned to daily practice and then started going to retreats again I was able to renew that special vision and then eventually deepen it. What exactly do I mean by deepen.. I deepened my realization in three ways. One way that it deepened is

intellectual. Entering into samadhi allowed me to have intellectual insights into the Buddhist teachings. For a long time I cultivated these insights and enjoyed them. They were something I could grasp on to and hold. They guided my practice. Simultaneously I practiced samadhi. I practiced samadhi in daily life as well as in meditation. In daily life the practice is simply to embrace what ever you are doing, to jump in to whatever you are doing with both feet, not intellectually, rather with the skill gained in meditation of clearing the mind of thought. One of my favorite practices was chopping wood. We heated with wood for many years. As I looked at that round ready to be chopped I would choose where I wanted the ax to fall, then I would gather my concentration and quiet my mind. Finally the energy would explode and the ax would slam into the wood. When I returned to doing sesshins, this time with Harada Roshi, my meditation really started to deepen. It became easier and easier to enter into samadhi, I spent longer periods of time in samadhi and the nature of the samadhi changed. I have already gone into the progress of this change so I will not totally repeat my self.. But I want to say that one of the most important insights I had is that the attachment I had to insight was actually a barrier to deepening samadhi and that eventually deepening samadhi became more important then the insight. When Harada told me that my training was complete and that I could now teach it was not because of any insights beyond what I told him the first day we met. It was because I had become sufficiently skilled at entering samadhi. From within samadhi insight is natural. There is no need to accumulate insights.. It is all right there.

In conclusion with all this practice eventually there is an integration that takes place between insight. samadhi and everyday life.. After one has experienced dozens, or maybe hundreds, of samadhis, moments of samadhi and insight stop standing out, and becomes suffused into the individual life. Yet this is a never ending life time project.