

## RESPONSE TO A CONVERSATION

A friend and I have been doing a job together. We are both Zen practitioners and of course we talk. We have never seen eye to eye on Zen practice and Buddhism, which is why I find our conversations so much fun. I am sure that my position is correct, after all I am authorized to teach Zen. That makes little difference to my friend who is also a long time student of Zen, meeting arguments with counter arguments. One of our ongoing discussions has been about the role of thought in meditation. I am of the opinion that in meditation it is important to learn to stop discursive thinking, my friend counters (I may not exactly understand my friend's point of view) that Zen is about learning to understand and apply the principles of non-attachment, oneness, compassion, emptiness, and other core Buddhist ideas, with our everyday thinking mind. Meditation then becomes the practice of mindfulness of this "every day mind" so that it is observed and understood, and then maybe transformed into an instrument of our own and others happiness.

I tell my friend that if he wants to understand how his mind works then he needs to experience the shutting down of all discursive and even emotional thought and observe the process from outside the every day mind. You the reader might ask how it is possible if this everyday mind is turned off, to observe anything, but my experience is that it is not only possible but reveals something deeper.

This is just the beginning of our ongoing discussion. The other day he asked me if I believed there is anything eternal. I did not answer a quick no, which would have been correct according to some Buddhist orthodoxy. Rather, I said that there is one thing which we can think of as eternal, at least as eternal as time itself, that is the field in which all other things are impermanent, that being the total Universe which includes all other universes, the totality of all that is as One, what we call in Buddhism the Dharmakaya, the Absolute.

My friend tells me he thinks I have made a mistake by calling anything eternal and hands me a book by the great 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna who argued that all things are the result of causes and conditions and therefore "Empty" of permanence. He also argued that even our attempts to solidify understanding by means of a verbal construct are also fraught with difficulties. Nagarjuna makes the linguistic argument that words and language have inherent contradictions and that any attempt to solidify even the simplest proposition is problematic and is empty of absolute meaning.. Even such a basic statement as, "My dog is brown", can be shown to have difficulties. For example do I see the color brown with my internal eye as the same color you see as brown? Maybe you or I are color blind or we just have different physiology of our eyes or our brains. And if the dog becomes gray as it ages was it ever proper to call the dog brown because the brown was not a fixed color but in the process of changing? These might seem like trivial issues but to the philosopher studying language they can be significant.

In the end Nagarjuna completes his argument like the ouroboros biting his own tail. He argues that even Emptiness, the quality of being empty of permanence and fixed understanding, is also empty of a fixed understanding. In other words he is qualifying his own argument with a question mark. The outcome of all this argumentation is a philosophy called Madhyamika which translates as The Middle Way. In the Madhyamika we take the middle road between all fixed ideas. Things are neither permanent nor do they not exist. My dog is neither brown nor is it not brown. This is a path between all dualistic notions. In Zen we have the common phrase, "Just don't know!" This Madhyamika has been called an epistemological non-duality. It directs us away from any dualistic assertions but it also doesn't affirm any larger non-duality like the Dharmakaya. It is not what is called an ontological non-duality. Also Nagarjuna's middle way is not Shakyamuni's (the historic Buddha) middle way which is an argument against the extremes of asceticism and hedonism as exemplified by the path of the Eight Fold Way.

Nagarjuna's philosophy is very much a response to the philosophic questions of his time. He focuses his arguments on the two philosophic positions, essentialism, that things have an essential

independent essence, that they are “things in them selves”, and nihilism, that asserts that things don't really exist at all. Essentialism and nihilism were issues central to Buddhist thought in Nagarjuna's time as they are today. Nagarjuna argues against these dual positions from an understanding of cause and effect or what in Buddhism is usually called “causes and conditions.” We might think that with modern science and our understanding of cause and effect these issues have been resolved but actually they are about psychological tendencies and central to the whole way we think. Even today we often fall into the traps of essentialism and nihilism. But first we have to understand what these traps are.

I like to think about the position of essentialism from a historical perspective. It is almost impossible for us humans to think of ourselves and anything else as other than “things in themselves,” independent entities having unique shapes and occupying unique places in space at any given time. (“Being in Itself” is the term used by philosophers just for people and other thinking things.) How could we not be independent entities? We have independent thoughts. We have independent desires. We make independent choices. Each one of us is unique. Of course we are independent entities. I am. This is the most natural position for people to take and this is the most natural starting point for our relationship with the rest of what is. The world is not fuzzy. It a place composed of things. This assumption underlies most of our thinking. It even underlies most of our religious and scientific thinking.

When we think about what we are we might initially think that we are our bodies. But, our bodies corrupt, die, and disappear. Our bodies have no essence. Then we think, our essence, our beingness is to be found in our internal world, our spirit which we believe is not the same as the external world where things corrupt die and disappear. “I think therefore I am.” We identify our “being in itself” with our internal spirit which does not corrupt and die

People who study the history of religion tell us that the early religions were Animistic. This is really just the belief that all things are beings in themselves in the same way that we humans are “beings in themselves.” In other words we took what we thought we understood about ourselves and applied it to the rest of the world. We believed that all things possessed a spirit an internal world. Certainly animals possessed spirits but also plants and mountains and also small inanimate objects like rocks were thought to posses spirits. And everything had to be handled with great care lest there be spiritual repercussions. Animism is the anthropomorphism of the world..

Eventually as our technology grew, some things became recognized as just material completely controllable by our manipulation.. Thought had to change. Now, only those things that are beyond human control and seemingly independent actors were thought to possess spirits. Certainly animals had spirits, and certainly the weather was the activity of spirits. And mountains must also have spirits, they could shake the world and even explode. Maybe plants were no longer thought to contain spirits. Agriculture had taught us that plants were controllable. And we could chop down a tree, fashion it into all sorts of things and there were no spiritual repercussions. Certainly trees did not have spirits. Now we started to develop primitive ideas of cause and effect to explain how things that obviously were without spirit became what they were. This has progressed until today many of us believe that only humans have spirits, only now we use the word soul instead of spirit. But still we are caught in a dualistic view of the word. Even if most things are without spirits and are no longer “beings in themselves” they are still “things in themselves.” We have a world divided into things. Even the modern physicist with a very sophisticated understanding of cause and effect is still in search of the essential things, atoms, subatomic particles, quarks.

Shakyamuni Buddha was born into a society 2500 years ago that believed that all animals had individual spirits called the atman.. Maybe they had taken the spirits they out of plants but certainly they maintained their belief that some mountains maintained there spirits. They also believed that there were several disembodied spirits in control of natural forces. And they believed in an overarching spirit called Brahman. They had a primitive idea of cause and effect which in there language was termed “causes and conditions”. But even the wording “causes and conditions” is in the service of

animistic belief where the wills of the spirits are the causes responding to the conditions encountered in the material world. I do not want you to think that early Indian thinkers were unsophisticated only that they were still caught in the assumptions of dualistic thought.

Shakyamuni sitting under a tree 2500 years ago had a most unusual revelation. He looked up at the morning star after a night of meditation and his experience of that star was so deep that he could not tell where he stopped and it began. (This can only happen when our minds are quiet and the almost instant habit of dividing the world up into things is suspended.) In that moment he saw beyond that whole dualistic, “thing in it self“ way of thinking that traps most of us and had an insight into a whole other non-dualistic view. When he started preaching shortly after this experience, the core of his view was expressed in three simple ideas. One, there is no atman. Two, everything is in constant change, nothing is permanent. Three, everything that is, is the result of causes and conditions.

This was a completely revolutionary idea in Shakyamuni's time. There was little science. People had just started to gain control of their environment and they had a very incomplete understanding of cause and effect. In one amazing leap he left behind the whole underpinnings of the human thought at of his time, and our time as well, the assumption of our own “being in itself” and the resulting dualistic view of the world divided up into things. Beyond his three simple ideas what is the world view Shakyamuni gives us? At this point my friend would probably stop me and say that any thing I say would be wrong or incomplete because language is insufficient and misleading to describe Shakyamuni's view. And I agree that my friend is in some sense correct, but that won't stop me. People who have glimpsed non-duality have been trying to express their understanding with language since Shakyamuni's time. And Shakyamuni was certainly willing to set a foundation for his view with his three statements. Language is also a very personal experience. For some it may mislead and for others it may open up deep insight.

The non-dual world view is of a single world undivided and fluid, constantly changing according to its own internal process. What we think of as individual things are like currents or waves, individually identifiable but just temporary phenomena empty of any “things in them selves.” This fluid image is not uncommon in Buddhism. We might say that no thing has intrinsic independent existence but this doesn't quite mean that things don't exist. We might say that all individual existence derives from pre-differentiated Existence. This pre-differentiated Existence has been giving many names, Ocean of Being, Dharmakaya, The Absolute, The True Self, Buddha, even God. And words like suchness, and emptiness have been used to describe the meditative experience of pre-differentiated existence.

We might say that Existence is eternal, but maybe this is not quite correct because time is a differentiated conceptualization. On the other hand maybe we should not think of time as being differentiated from existence, but rather inseparably the same. Dogen the Japanese Zen philosopher takes this position in his essay Being Time. Certain intricacies of Existence may be beyond human language and understanding but still pre-differentiated Existence can be recognized and we can develop an ever deepening understanding of ourselves as temporary phenomena within this Absolute Existence.

When we think about Shakyamuni's teachings and the time he lived in we realize that his non-atman doctrine and his ideas about interdependent causation and constant change, denied the existence of things in the very way that existence was understood in his time. A modern scientist might be somewhat comfortable with Shakyamuni's view, but even today and certainly in Shakyamuni's time few would be comfortable denying the foundation of our thought, our own independent existence and the existence of other independent individual things. They might not even think of interdependent existence as existence at all. Shakyamuni understood that when we use the word *exist* we are just expressing an idea in our mind. We think a word like *exist* is a true map of something real, but it also creates a way in which we experience the world which itself affects the map. If we stop thinking and conceptualizing, the world does not go away as some might think.. Words and conceptualization partner with what actually is, and the rest of our nervous system, to create our experience.

With this understanding we can go in various directions in our relationship to words and the concept of existence. Shakyamuni chose one direction in his Twelve Fold Chain of Interdependent Origination. The Twelve Fold Chain is Shakyamuni's attempt to show, starting with our ignorance and ending in birth and death and rebirth, how we develop an idea of our own existence. This is a psychological model of our constantly repeating process of reifying our own existence. Some people think it is explanation of reincarnation but I don't think so. I think it is very much a meditator's description of the almost instant psychological process of personal identification as observed through meditation.

Here is one way in which we can think of existence. Things exist, we exist, when we think they exist. Things exist in the very process of reification. Then in meditation when the process of reification is shut down, things no longer exist. When things no longer exist we no longer exist. There is nothing wrong with this view of individual existence. It denies neither heaven nor earth the two poles of the meditator's experience.

Nagarjuna went in another direction. He went in a philosopher's direction, not taking the experiential approach but rather the intellectual approach. He was a man absorbed in ideas and intellectual analysis. Using the Buddhist ideas of interdependent causation and emptiness he analyzed the common notion of existence as "being in itself" arising from our dualistic world view and showed its flaws. He then went on to show that language and our whole way of thinking is also essentially flawed in its assumption of duality. In conclusion he warned us away from taking any fixed positions especially the ideas that things exist or that things don't exist. While Shakyamuni accepts individual existence as a psychological phenomenon, Nagarjuna rejects individual existence precisely because it is a psychological phenomenon that carries with it the incorrect assumptions of independent dualistic existence. My response and maybe Shakyamuni's response is that once one thoroughly understands that the assumption of independent existence is incorrect then the quite natural process of reification of things no longer carries the assumption of independent existence but is simply how we deal with experience. But thoroughly understanding that the assumption of independent experience is incorrect is not just a philosophic understanding it is also a deeply experienced understanding.

There is also a third direction that can be taken in our understanding of individual existence, language, and reification. This is the direction that Zen thinkers like Dogen often take, this is actually an embrace of reification, everything becomes real again, but now we know things exist in their interdependence, an interdependence that is so deep that it becomes identity. One might call this poetic liberation because we can say things like "The whole Universe exists in this one drop of water." or "food drink and clothing are the skin and flesh of the great masters" or "mountains walk" and know them to be true. One can even make two seemingly completely contrary statements such as "Things exist as what they are for only a moment ever changing into something else.", and "Things are eternal not only existing for a moment but for all time.." and know them both to be true. In poetic liberation words loose their fixed meaning and understanding becomes poetic realization, a truth from one of infinite perspectives. We can also see this poetic use of words in the introduction to many Mahayana Sutras in which the settings for the Shakyamuni's talks are extravagantly described. Harada calls this "the language of the inconceivable." Its use tells us right from the beginning of the Sutra that we need to understand language differently if we are to understand the Sutra.

As I said before the Madhyamika philosophy has been called an epistemological non-duality. It has also been claimed that the difference between Buddhism and Hinduism is that Buddhism is just an epistemological non-duality while Hinduism is an ontological non-duality. In Hinduism there is a claim of a single entity that contains all other entities which they call God or Brahmin (the Universal Soul). In this view all else is viewed as Maya (illusion). Is this really different from Buddhism? Maybe some forms of Buddhism hold to just an epistemological non-dualism but I don't think that Shakyamuni's enlightenment was just an intellectual realization of some philosophic position but rather was a deep experience of ontological non-duality.. It was also not just a moment when his subjective

separation broke down and he had a moment of Oneness with some thing. My own experience tells me that it was a moment in which he clearly recognized and understood that everything is a manifestation of the One the Dharmakaya. He recognized the One because for more than just a moment he cut the chain of interdependent origination and stopped the process which continually reifies his own existence and differentiates undifferentiated existence. In Zen we call this the Great Death and it happens when we stop all dualistic thought, completely forget ourselves and then open our eyes to the undifferentiated One. For most of us to stop all dualistic thought is to stop all thought. Our linguistic thought is certainly dualistic and so is our visual thought in its multiplicity of things. Even music is dualistic in the recognition of individual notes and melody.

My friend might then say, "What about when you enter so deeply into an activity like sports or doing art or just being with a friend and drop all self consciousness or when you forget any idea of your own importance in an act of kindness? I think this is the practice of Zen, this is non-duality, this is Oneness."

My response is yes this is Zen practice but I emphasize the word practice. Though these practices have their own intrinsic value, they are also skillful means by which eventually we may experience the Great Death. We might say that these are little deaths. Each time we forget our individual self we weaken the attachment in our thinking to the idea of an individual self. Yet, we can forget ourselves one hundred times or one hundred thousand times in the activities of life and never have a great death experience, and never recognize the undifferentiated One. This is because we carry around the assumption of duality in our thoughts and the way we experience things. We use the assumption of duality in sports and art when we aim a shot or pick up a tool even if the self is forgotten. We are still breaking the world up into things. We need to some how completely stop our whole dualistic way of thinking for some period of time so that the habit of dualistic thought does not reassert itself at the first chance. Then we can experience the world through non-dualistic eyes. This is why we practice meditation

In his book *Zen Practice*, Sekida talks about what he calls Absolute Samadhi, that experience in meditation where all thought is stopped, but more than just having a quiet mind, all sense of time is stopped, even awareness stops. The mind become like a clear mirror reflecting the object of meditation with no one there. Even memory is shut down so that when this state of mind ends there is not even a memory of the experience. It is simply black. My friend wondered why anyone would want to have this experience, or lack of experience. But I agree with Sekida, that this most difficult to reach of meditative experiences, is very important for it can be the gate to non-duality. This is that place where all traces of dualistic thought are suspended. And as we awaken into awareness from this place maybe we might awaken into a world without duality. Maybe we will have a deep experience of the Dharmakaya, our true Self.

Absolute samadhi is nothing other then forgetting the self, but it is forgetting the self in the practice of zen meditation. In Zen meditation we are not engaging the world with dualistic thoughts but rather clearing our thoughts by the simple act of following the breath, listening or feeling the body. This simplicity is very important and it also makes the practice in some way very difficult.

The difficulty of entering absolute samadhi for any length of time can be profound. It usually takes many years of meditation practice before even short moments of absolute samadhi happen. And just as forgetting the self in the activities of life, this complete forgetting the self of Absolute Samadhi does not promise enlightenment. At first it might even be frightening. To disappear into blackness is scary but with a little experience we realize we always come back to the light and it feels refreshing, joyful and clean.

Absolute Samadhi is important because it is a doorway. Probably for the first several times into this doorway you will stand there for a few moments and then step back into a dualistic thinking. The "I" will still be there. But if you step through this doorway your eyes will open to a completely different world, only it won't be your eyes that have opened, it will be the Universe's eyes that have

opened, and they will be staring directly at itself. This is Kensho. This is the direct experience of our true nature. This is a very different type of samadhi. Now there is no "I" and it is bright and clear and wide awake, and quiet. That constant chatter of thought that follows us everywhere is not there. This does not mean that there is no cognition in this bright samadhi only that this cognition does not depend on words. It is like the artist or athlete deep in concentration who knows and makes the next move without any verbal thought. Only now you are just sitting there filled with a nonverbal knowing. You might ask, "What do you know?" Well, you know that when the wind blows, the wind is blowing, and that when a bird chirps a bird is chirping and this is so clear that there is no need to verbalize. But the most important thing about this samadhi is that because there is no "I" there is no duality. Yet still you might not recognize this non-duality. There is still one step missing. Without the clear recognition and cognition of non-duality when verbal thought starts up again – and it will – you will still think in your old typical dualistic way.

What exactly sparks this cognition? It is different for each individual. For me, it was upon hearing a loud bird chirp and for a moment completely disappearing into that sound. For that moment everything went completely black. And then I recognized that for the moment of that chirp there was only this sound without any "I" and that for that moment all that defined an "I" just wasn't there. This cognition seemed to resonate so deeply that in a few short moments a deep unspoken understanding of non-duality and Buddhist practice emerged. Sometimes, maybe all the time, it takes a moment of complete absolute samadhi to convince the individual mind of individual selflessness. How could we have any fundamental 'being in itself' or soul when through this process of meditation we can turn everything off. And then without the assumption of our fundamental individuality our dualistic worldview dissolves. No longer is the world seen as a collection of things interacting but one thing in some sort of process of continuous change manifesting the temporary appearance of individual things. This is the recognition of the Dharmakaya, the absolute and eternal body of the Buddha. This is not a place where Nagarjuna goes in his philosophy.

I have heard, from my teacher, Harada Roshi, that this step happens differently for each individual. Each time it emerges with a different flavor, different insights, different emotions, and different levels of energy. Sometimes the insight is simply a feeling of oneness with everything and everybody around. Maybe there is a deep recognition of everything and everybody around as me. Maybe there is even the cognition of the Universe awakening to self awareness. Sometimes the insight is mind shattering sometimes it is not. The insight might be accompanied with various emotions of different strengths. Love, compassion, joy and even sorrow are possible with kensho. Lastly kensho is accompanied with a strange nervous system energy called chi or ki by zen meditators, or kundalini in the Indian systems of meditation. I cannot give a scientific description or definition of chi. The experience of chi seems to be too personal to be pinned down in that way, yet it is an important component of the kensho experience. Here is my understanding of chi as I have put it together from my own experience, what I have been told by Harada Roshi and what I have read.

I think of chi as nervous system energy. The physical body including the brain is continually accumulating chi as well as using it up in activity and thought. For most of us a sort of balance is developed in which the amount of chi we have doesn't vary much and frankly we are just unconscious of it. Though we might say then when we are tired or sick our chi is low and that when we are healthy and energetic our chi is high. But then, when we meditate and just sit there and if we can actually slow or stop our thinking now chi begins to accumulate. If we can sit and quiet the mind for an extended period of time then we will accumulate chi well beyond our normal experience. The high levels of chi we can accumulate in meditation have some amazing powers. It can also be dangerous. High levels of chi can increase the sensitivity of the nervous system making sounds seem clearer and colors seem brighter. I am reminded of Hakuin the great Japanese zen master, listening to the individual flakes of snow touch the ground during his kensho experience. High levels of chi can help with clarity of thought and concentration. High levels of chi can also have the effect of clearing the nervous system

pathways of blockages and constrictions. This can happen in both the body and the brain. We can feel this in meditation as the body relaxes and our breathing becomes smooth and deeper. We also experience this in our mind and body as deep unresolved emotional issues come to the surface. Here is where meditation can become dangerous. We don't want to reinforce any dangerous and delusive thinking and emotions with our unusually high levels of chi. We don't want to let ourselves get caught thinking about unresolved issues. Meditation is not that type of therapy. Instead in meditation we should try to just let the emotional energy of these issues pass through our body. This will defang the issue by dropping its emotional content. Here again the high level of chi can help by increasing concentration and mindfulness which allows us to let these emotional explosions pass.

Not many Zen teachers talk much about chi but in several of the Indian systems of meditation chi is well understood and utilized. There is an understanding that there are several psycho-emotional centers that line up through the center of the body, from the coccyx to the crown of the head, which are called chakras. Chi (kundalini) moves up and down the center of the body activating these chakras, depending on circumstance, joining emotion to thought. Chi also moves throughout the whole body but the central channel has special importance in meditation. As we accumulate chi in meditation we can become conscious of chi moving from chakra to chakra and maybe even consciously propel its movement. In Zen meditation we are told to hold our concentration at the Tanden or Hara. This chakra is located just below the belly button. There is a reason for this, the Tanden is the energetic center of the body, and it also seems to be a storage point for the accumulation of chi. As we meditate, if we concentrate on the tanden we will store the accumulating chi in our tanden not activating other chakras, helping quiet the mind, relax the body, and deepen concentration and awareness.

One time, during a retreat, I was waiting for sanzen, an individual meeting with the teacher, meditating in a special room. I was calmly focusing on my breath then I felt an energy rise into my chest and then my heart started to palpitate, beating hard and fast. I thought this was just nervousness, but I was sitting deeply so I put extra effort into concentration on the Tanden hoping to calm my body and slow down the heart. Behold, it worked, but then if concentration slipped again my heart started to race. I wondered why this was happening because my sitting was deep and I was no longer thinking about the up coming sanzen. When it was finally my turn and I was in sanzen, Harada asked me how it was going and I told him, "The energy goes up and the energy goes down." He jumped on this and started talking about how chi goes up and down through the center of the body and that it is common to experience uncontrolled chi as meditation deepens. This is because the body is not accustomed to so much chi. He ended the conversation by telling me that in time these effects will stop as I learn to settle the chi in the Tanden. I am now very conscious of chi when I meditate. I consciously accumulate chi and use it to deepen my sitting.

The chakras are not only emotional centers, they are also emotional constriction points. We unconsciously constrict these points when we don't want to feel certain emotions. In time the chakras can become permanently clogged and our emotional life is no longer healthy. The accumulation of chi in meditation can be very important in unclogging the chakras, and releasing long repressed emotions. Once the chakras are unclogged then chi can freely move through our emotional centers activating them in healthy response to the situations of life.

There is a very important dynamic between chi, concentration, samadhi, and kensho. With our normal amount of chi deep concentration in meditation is very difficult. The mind wanders and we are often caught by thoughts. With effort and even a few short moments of concentration chi starts to accumulate. Now with the extra chi concentration becomes easier and meditation deepens. Chi continues to increase helping meditation deepen causing chi to continue increasing. At any point if we allow ourselves to drift into thinking we can quickly use up the excess chi and lose the power of concentration so it is important to maintain effort to hold concentration on the breath and the Tanden. If this effort is maintained long enough the mind will become almost completely quiet and concentration will be so powerful it is almost palpable. We can now direct our concentration with such

power that we completely disappear and enter black absolute samadhi.. We are filled with chi to capacity. Harada describes this as being filled with chi like a taught balloon. Now with a spark, a pin prick, what in Zen we call a turning word, or maybe a thought about a koan, the chi does its thing and rises from the tanden through the chakras, maybe lighting up the Heart Chakra in our chest for an inexpressible experience of love, or maybe it goes all the way to the head giving a life changing insight into our true nature. This is the unique flavor of kensho.

Now we find ourselves completely filled with chi from head to toe and if we open our eyes and look around everything is clear in an expansive awareness that seems to take in everything all at once. Sounds, sights, smells, all sensations seem to be entering consciousness without restriction. The mind is for the most part quiet, and we find ourselves in an effortless completely awake bright samadhi. We have awoken into the non-dual Universe. When Harada Roshi tells the story of Shakimuni Buddha's Enlightenment experience he says that Shakimuni exclaimed "How wonderful! How wonderful! All people have this same clear bright mind that I have awakened to." He emphasizes that it is this clear bright state of mind and not any specific understanding, which is the essence of Zen Enlightenment. It is because non-dual understanding is inherent in this state of mind. This is the place where koans make perfect sense.

When I earlier wrote that Kensho can come in a variety of powers I was thinking about chi. Not always is kensho accompanied by a grand explosion of chi. Sometimes it is just a little explosion, and the accompanying samadhi will not be very deep and last just a short time, Other times it is a huge explosion and you will find yourself in samadhi for days. This all depends on how much chi is involved. When retreat is over and our meditation schedule is substantially reduced the excess chi dissipates and we eventually return to a more normal state of mind with lots of thinking and discrimination but we are also changed, deeply effected by the experience. How we think about things and our emotional relationship to the world has changed. Maybe we will have a generally higher level of chi then before the experience and continue to notice some effects from the chi, and maybe deep states of meditation are more easily accessible.

We think there is somebody there, somebody inside our heads, a me, but Buddhism teaches us that this is not the case. Maybe a better understanding is that we are simply a physical body animated by chi.

One thing I have noticed from my experience is that at first the entering of clear bright samadhi was almost like the turning of a switch. It was not something that came upon me gradually but happened with a sharp demarcation. At first this demarcation was a moment of absolute black samadhi, later the demarcation would be a rush of energy. After reading *My Stroke of Insight* by Jill Bolte Taylor I have come to think that perhaps clear bright samadhi is a phenomena related to the right side of our brain.. Maybe this bright samadhi is in some way a turning on of consciousness in the right side of our brain ,while black samadhi is the turning off of our normal verbal discriminating consciousness, which resides in the left side of our brain. I don't know but this is an interesting thought. I have also experienced that as I become more skilled at entering this clear bright samadhi the sharp demarcation between my verbal discriminating mind and this quiet, awake samadhi has disappeared. I no longer have experiences of black samadhi and rarely do I experience a rush of chi energy though I still feel my body fill up with chi if I sit for extended periods. My whole approach to meditation has changed due to these experiences, and of course my whole understanding of life has also changed. This is why I think non-thinking is important.

I have many friends who have been practicing meditation for years, doing retreats and all, generally putting a lot of time on the pillow and they have had few if any deep meditative experiences. I have many thoughts about why this is the case. I think there are generally two approaches to meditation.

One approach is to not put any effort into controlling or disciplining the mind but rather to let go of effort and just try to be mindful of the minds functioning. This way we come to understand the

delusive nature of our thinking. Some people of this school say we should not practice with any desire to experience enlightenment and that in fact enlightenment is when we realize there is nothing to be accomplished in practice. With this approach how can we ever have deep meditative experiences?

The other approach is that through the application of effort in meditation we learn to hone concentration and mindfulness which together is the path to samadhi and enlightenment. I have always been a practitioner of this second approach. Harada once told me that I understood that meditation was like a sport. I put effort into practice and I experience the rewards of that effort. I think of meditation not so much as a sport but an exploration a scientific adventure, especially at retreat where I have the time to push into new ground and experience new places in meditation.

I think of Zen as primarily an experiential discipline. All teachings are to be verified and understood through meditation. Even such seemingly simple teachings as Suzuki's beginner's mind and Shakyamuni's teaching on non-attachment cannot be fully understood without deep experience in meditation. But if we attach to the surface understanding of the teachings and think this is what Zen and Buddhism is about then they become impediments to deeper understanding and deeper experience

There is a story in the *Transmission of the Lamp* that when the philosopher Nagarjuna met the Dharma Master Kapimeala. Kapimeala said to Nagarjuna "I give you a wish fulfilling jewel." Nagarjuna ready to apply his philosophic technique asked, "Does it have form or is it formless?" Spinal responds, "This jewel neither has form nor is it formless." Nagarjuna was stunned by this response. His internal philosophical prattle was stopped cold. In that instant he understood Kapimeala's gift. Kapimeala in an earlier story received the jewel as the "Ocean of Buddha Nature." In the Suragama Sutra it says "The whole Universe is one bright pearl." This jewel, this pearl, this ocean of Buddha Nature is the Dharmakaya.. While the Dharmakaya has no form it contains all forms. It manifests as every form feeling impulse consciousness and thought. There is not anything outside the Dharmakaya nor does anything exist from within the Dharmakaya. This is not something to be understood through normal dualistic thought nor can it be understood as epistemological non-duality. This is ontological non-duality and can only be understood through an ontological experience of non-duality.

It might seem that we have arrived at a version of mystical pantheism where everything is God but instead we Buddhists call it the Dharmakaya. There is some truth to this view but when Shakyamuni talked about his understanding he eschewed theological language and instead presented a radical understanding of cause and effect. Theological language then and now is based on an anthropomorphic projection in which God or gods are viewed to be some how like our own ignorant understanding of ourselves, an individual with thoughts and emotions. But Shakyamuni wanted to turn our whole understanding around. He said, look around, clearly view the natural world and see that everything results from cause and effect and is thereby ephemeral ever changing. Now understand that we humans with our internal world of thoughts and emotions also result from cause and effect and are ephemeral ever changing.. Now comes the kicker, if we truly drop any thought of our specialness as humans, and understand that we humans result from the same processes from which everything results, then our whole dualistic world view disintegrates and we are left with an experience of ontological non-duality.

The experience and understanding of non-duality changes everything. We now see with the Dharma Eye, the perspective of the Dharmakaya, the perspective of the Universe. Even our understanding of cause and effect needs to change. Our normal dualistic understanding of cause and effect, as the interaction of the multiplicity of things, now is understood non-dualistically as the Dharmakaya in process, evolving.. Hakuin in the Song of Zazen called this "the oneness of cause and effect."

Going back to Nagarjuna, after an exhaustive analysis showing that all things are empty, because all things are temporary ephemeral results of cause and effect, he asks the question, "is even this

emptiness empty?” Surprisingly he says yes. We might think that that he has bitten his own tail and has chewed all the way up to his eye balls. reducing his whole system of argumentation to absurdity. We might think he has put us in a position where we are afraid to say anything about anything.. But we can interpret Nagarjuna differently. We can see his idea of emptiness as resulting from interdependent causation as empty from the larger perspective of Ontological non-duality. Causation is just an idea of the way things look from a dualistic perspective.

Shakyamuni had no problem talking about the world and countless enlightened Buddhist teachers past and present have also had no problem talking about the world. They spoke about interdependent causation, and the ever changing nature of the world and may even have used words like process and evolution. Though we understand that language carries dualistic assumptions this is not a problem from inside a non-dual perspective. From inside a non-dual perspective no where does duality exist. The seeming dualistic confusion we humans are caught in, the suffering this seems to create, samsara, is just the activity of the non-dual Dharmakaya.

This is still too abstract. In Zen we always talk about the True Self or the Large Self. In Zen we are not looking for just an intellectual understanding of the Dharmakaya. but rather a deep identification, through experience with the Dharmakaya. It is through this identification that we understand that we and all other individual things have and will always be the whole Universe. The whole Universe, and I am not talking about just this Universe that is observed by astronomers, I am talking about the totality of what is. One might think that this is an eternalist position and some how violates Buddhist understanding but this is actually the other side of understanding that all things are impermanent ever changing, ephemeral. If we just stop at an understanding of impermanence we can easily fall into a type of nihilism in which nothing exists except as projections of our own mind. But this is only because we are still caught in a dualistic perspective in which there is still an individual who has a mind that makes projections. Truly if everything is impermanent and ephemeral without any individual existence, including ourselves, and our minds, then everything becomes one thing, this mysterious process we call the Universe, the Dharmakaya, our True Self.

When the Zen Master says “Do you hear the stream? Become one with the stream!” he is ultimately not asking for the individual through some sort of profound state of mind to become one with the stream. The Zen Master is asking the individual to recognize that he already is, has been, and always will be, one with the stream. He contains the stream and the stream contains him, not just for a moment in time in which both exist but for all time past present and future. The present contains both the past and the future in our identification with the Dharmakaya and through our understanding of interdependent origination.

Yet in another sense the present completely cuts off past and future. This is the reality of deep meditation. This is when we have dropped all thoughts of either past or future, even dropped all traces of past thought habits, and become fully present, completely clear. This is deep samadhi. It is because of the clarity of deep samadhi, because all our past thought habits are dropped that we can now understand from a completely different perspective. It is from here that we can clearly see both past and future and understand the non-dual, the Dharmakaya, our True Self. This is prajna (wisdom). Hui Neng the sixth Chinese Patriarch said “Prajna is the function of samadhi and samadhi is the body of prajna..” Some people think that prajna is a flash of insight that cuts through the confusion of our ordinary mind, but actually it is the natural result of a clear mind.

“The matter of birth and death is of great importance.” Resolving this question has always been considered a key step in Zen. Without this resolution we are caught in a cycle of suffering caused by the fear of death. Only by deeply penetrating the non-dual, the Dharmakaya, can we resolve the question of birth and death and see that there really is no birth or death but only the Dharmakaya which neither is born nor dies. And then it is our identification with the Dharmakaya as the True Self that allows us to drop all attachment to a personal self and lay a solid foundation for happiness. The understanding of Emptiness as all things being ephemeral results of cause and effect, without taking the

next step into non-duality, does not do this. This just leads to nihilism. And a mastery of that quiet peaceful state of mind called Samadhi or even a temporary experience of oneness is also not quite enough to lay a solid foundation because we eventually return to our dualistic way of thinking.

These are both important steps but it is in the identification with the Dharmakaya that we become one with all that is, both past and future, and loose the fear of death. It is in the identification with the Dharmakaya that we engage the intellectual side of our intelligence and create a balance in our understanding that brings this Buddhist thing into all aspects of our lives. It is in the identification with the Dharmakaya that we realize this whole Universe is perfect the way it is, just one bright jewel, that it could not be other than it is, but that it will be different in the future. It is in the identification with the Dharmakaya that we realize that we humans do not suffer because we live in a world of duality, there isn't any duality nor in a certain sense any suffering or for that matter any happiness. It is in the identification with the Dharmakaya that we fulfill the Bodhisattva vow to liberate all sentient beings, realizing that they have always been liberated. It is in the identification with the Dharmakaya that one individual's liberation becomes everybody's liberation. It is in the identification with the Dharmakaya that we loose fear and can trust. It is in the identification with the Dharmakaya that we lay a solid foundation for happiness. It is in the identification with the Dharmakaya that we can live in a world of particulars and still be grounded in Oneness. I could go on and on but that seems a little ridiculous and pompous. The point is that this non-dual identification with the Universe gives us a whole different way of understanding that can resolve all internal conflicts and make us happy. It also seems to create a flexibility of mind that seems to liberate one from any fixed ideas, including our Zen and Buddhist ideas and also liberates one to use ideas with an unusual flexibility. In Zen we call this seeing with the Dharma Eye.

There is a Koan story in Zen which goes, a Zen student asks the master; "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the west?" The Zen master replies, "The oak tree in the garden.?" Though the student is asking about Bodhidharma we can assume he is asking about the meaning of the Buddha Dharma, but the Zen master's response seems to be so incongruous it makes little sense. What is the relationship between an oak tree and the Buddha Dharma? One might think the student was asking a great big metaphysical question and just got, in the scheme of things, one little ephemeral tree. But that tree is not just one little ephemeral thing. No thing is just a thing. Nagarjuna might have pointed out that a thing is empty of any true reality and made it less than a thing, nothing. But seeing with the Dharma Eye also makes a thing infinitely more than just an isolated ephemeral thing. It is precisely because a thing is empty of any "being in it self" that it is in some sense the whole Universe, the Dharmakaya. While in some sense the Dharmakaya is an unfathomable mystery, the embodiment of *the mystery*, it is also known in each and every thing. The Oak Tree in the garden is the whole Universe, the Dharmakaya. There is another term for the Dharmakaya used in the Avatsamsaka Sutra, Dharmadatu. Dharmadatu means the interpenetration of the dharmas. Dharma as it is used here is sense object. All things are dharmas. But in understanding the Dharmadatu all things so interpenetrate that they become each other and each thing in some way becomes the whole Universe. This is an understanding in which our normal view of cause and effect breaks down and the Universe is seen as an infinitely complex web of causation in which there are no individual causes. There is only one cause and that is the whole Dharmadatu, the Dharmakaya. Each and every thing is a manifestation of the Dharmakaya, and the Dharmakaya is the sum total of the activity of every thing.

This world of individual things is not the realm of duality, it is the realm of the relative. We might say that things have relative existence, are relatively real. What we honestly and truthfully say about things is relative truth. Even the meaning of words is relative, relative to the time and place and understanding behind its use. The use of the word relative is to point out the relational quality of things, that things (and beings) only come into temporary existence in their relation to the rest of the Universe.

My friend's view that anything said about the Absolute nature of reality, is necessarily

incomplete, dualistic, and therefore false is true from one perspective. Yet this understanding has not stopped. From the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, Buddhist masters and Zen masters have been describing the Absolute in various ways. Shakyamuni said that everything is constantly changing, that everything results from causes and conditions, and that nothing -especially us humans- has a soul (atman). We might not think it is but this is a description of the Absolute. The further developments of the concept of cause and effect and sunyata (emptiness) in the Mahayana is also a description of the Absolute. The Doctrine of the Tri Kaya is also a description of the Absolute. The seemingly mythological realms and qualities of the cosmic Bodhisattvas, Avalokiteshvara, Manjusri, Samitabhadra, Amitaba, etc. are also descriptions of the Absolute. The Zen master Rinzi even personified the Absolute when he called it the "man of no rank."

Language in Buddhism has often been used with an uncommon liberality. Deep Buddhist experience is not only a liberation from the bonds of suffering it is also a liberation from the exact meaning of words, a poetic liberation allows for an infinite number of expressions for Buddhist truth.. Shodo Haradha Roshi calls the unusual use of language in Buddhism the "language of the inconceivable." I think it can be better understood if we think of it as the language of identity in which metaphor is stretched to the limit. Deep Buddhist experience allows one to see things through the lens of non-duality in which every individual thing becomes a metaphor for every other individual thing and all things are metaphors for the Absolute.

One expression of this understanding is the doctrine of the Trikaya, the three bodies of the Buddha. The Sambogakaya -the bliss body- is the individual being of a Buddha enjoying the bliss of individual realization. This is the perspective of relative thingness. The Nirmanakaya -the transformation body- is the body of identification in which a Buddha sees him/her self as the other. In Zen we emphasize this experience. When our subjective separation breaks down and we become the other. We can become the other in many different ways. We can become a sound in deep meditation, or as Shakyamuni looked up and became the morning star we can become an inanimate object. But we can also become another being in our deep capacity for empathy and love. This is where the Bodhisattva path begins. Lastly there is the Dharmakaya which contains everything, all universes all rolled up into One. This is non-duality brought to the limit. All three of these bodies can not really be separated. The Sambogakaya and the Nirmanakaya are just aspects of the Dharmakaya. But they do represent different aspects of Buddhist experience and understanding, and each represents a different perspective expressed in different language. The perspective of the Nirmanakaya is the language of "just this", clear and precise in a world of multiplicity, giving credence and respect to our individual experience. This is the language of Shakyamuni and Theravada Buddhism. The Perspective of the Sambogakaya is expressed in the language of identity. What immediately comes to mind is Rivers and Mountains Sutra by Dogen Zenji. This essay cannot be understood unless the reader becomes the rivers and mountains. Unless we become the mountains how could we understand that "mountains walk"? Dogen stretches the reader by stretching the use of metaphor in a way that only deep experience of Oneness would allow. Lastly the Dharmakaya gives us the perspective of the whole Universe in which both nothing exists and everything exists. This contains the other perspectives and it also contains many more perspectives which we see throughout Buddhist literature. From the perspective of the Dharmakaya we can understand undifferentiated Oneness, we can understand Emptiness, we can even understand the magical language that starts most of the Mahayana Sutras.

There are multiple perspectives we need to understand if we are to understand the full variety of Zen and Buddhist language. These are the various perspectives of practice and instruction in practice. Sometime I think these are the most confusing because they are seemingly the easiest to understand and because of that we often attach to them and think, "This is Zen." or "This is practice." But like the world around, our practice is always changing, evolving into something new and a specific understanding that may be important at one stage in our practice can hold us back from progressing. One such teaching is "Only don't know!" The most obvious understanding of this

teaching is that as Zen practitioners we should drop all our previous assumed understanding of things, develop a questioning attitude, and be willing to say “I don't know!” When starting a practice in Zen this is a very good attitude, but then as we progress in our practice maybe our understanding of “Only don't know!” changes. We might understand “Only don't know!” as being about that place in meditation where even the assumptions of thought end because thought is stopped. This is carrying the teaching of “Only don't know” to another place. But then “Only don't know!” becomes only not enough because there is not yet enlightenment.. How can we answer a koan if we hold to “Only don't know!”? And then once there is enlightenment there is a definite knowing and so “Only don't know!” is no longer applicable..

There is the thought that the individual has only his/her self's own experience to work with in the quest to find understanding. This seems eminently reasonable, that the quest comes down to the subjectivity of the individual and yet it is based on the assumption that the individual has some real existence as a “being in itself.” This is not the perspective of the Dharmakaya. If we enter the perspective of the Dharmakaya we must say that all understanding and all experience is revelation. The Oak tree in the garden is a revelation, The thoughts that are swirling through your head as you are reading this essay are revelation. They are brought to you by the Universe. Understanding is not something we so much figure out as are given by the Universe and the situation. And even the idea that there is an individual who has the revelation is not quite correct. Maybe it would be more accurate to say that the individual and the understanding are relative parts of the whole situation which includes the whole Universe. There is no subject object duality and though many people in seeking to understand non-duality drop the object and preserve the subject, it would be more accurate if we drop the idea of a subject and the idea of a subjective perspective and realize that there is only the objective, which is the whole Universe. This does not mean in any way that our thoughts are correct only that they appear as they must. Even our thoughts of self and our desires, this is just the Universe talking, these are just the Universe's own delusions and the Universes own desires.

The experience we call enlightenment is the revelation of the Dharmakaya and the Dharmakaya's perspective. We might also say that enlightenment is just the Universe awakening from a dream of individual selves to its own Self awareness. Yet once the experience of enlightenment has passed the individual returns to the individual perspective but this individual perspective has greatly changed. It's foundation is now the Dharmakaya manifesting as a multiplicity of perspectives.

Yasutani Roshi in his commentary on Dogen's **Genjo Koan**, **Flowers Fall**, wrote:

**To speak traditionally, “When all dharmas are Buddha – dharmas,” is the “gate of setting up differences.” It's the relative position. But it is not the relative position that the unenlightened person sees. It is the relative position that has the absolute position as it's ground.. In other words it's the relative in the midst of the absolute.**