

# 'Lucky to be here'

**Teisho given by Roshi Susan Murphy**

**at Autumn 2013 Sesshin of the**

**Zen Open Circle, Sydney.**

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There is no other way to walk the Way than through the gate of Mu. No other way to truly 'Make yourselves comfortable', as we say at the beginning of Teisho. 'Does a dog have Buddha Nature or not?' asks the monk, of Zhaozhou.

Although it is not a koan about dogs in the end, I do find something delightfully instructive about the presence of a dog leading the Way in the case of Mu. Think about the way a dog proceeds on a walk... with great alertness, listening, hearing everything. Nothing is left unattended by the receptive ears and nose. But the path of any relaxed dog is not effortful, it is instead mysterious - it proceeds in fits and starts, circles back, involves playing, the odd twirl and pounce. The path of Mu also involves pouncing and twirling...literally twirling completely around, and that is the spirit to bring to your practice. An imaginative, even visionary mind is not out of place in working with Mu, you may bring to it everything that your soul has gathered into itself up to now. Nothing should be left out, on the contrary everything is waiting to be included. I want to encourage you to look for the way in which Mu is constantly waiting on all of us, on our every move, it leaves nothing and none of us out.

In an interesting encounter Daiju came to Baso and Baso asked, 'What do you come here for?' That's a great question to ask yourself every time you walk in: 'What am I doing here? What do I come here for?' Daiju replied, 'To seek Buddha Dharma.' What is this original untrammelled nature, how can I know it for myself and settle it in my own heart? Baso replies, 'I have nothing to give you.' Mu does not have or have not, offers no way to get something. There is nothing to get. And it cannot be 'given' by anybody except you. He

goes on, 'Why do you ignore the treasure of your own house and wander so far from home?' Why seek Buddha-Dharma as though it were somewhere other than where and what you are.

To 'wander so far from home' is to try to propel ourselves into finding that which we already are. You cannot push yourself into realizing Mu. Daiju then asked, 'What is my treasure house?' And Baso replies, 'None other than the one who is questioning me now is your treasure house.' It comes back to us, it always comes back completely, fully, overflowing to us. Every koan points to you. At this Daiju came to a great awakening and ever after he urged his friends, open your own treasure house and use those treasures freely.

There is a koan that you will encounter as you walk the path which says (in the words of Dogen), 'The storehouse of treasures opens of its own accord. You may take them and use them freely.' Luckily they are inexhaustible. We really do have everything that we need right at hand. Yet still we live inside a small and somewhat airless dream of needing something, of lacking something, of seeking something that we do not have. The great 180 degree twirl of Mu is to discover it's here, there is nowhere else that Mu can be. It blooms in your eyes, in your hands and feet, and everything you do and are.

This small closed airless dream is like our default setting, that practice must correct to 'reality'. Somewhere along the line we learn to avoid something as wondrous as what we are and where we are. And to have the small view of it instead as our default setting. It can be an elaborated view, it can have theories of physics, it can have any content that you care to pour into it. But it is still not face to face with reality. In a way our practice is allowing the self to forget its old small airless dream - of being pitted against reality, of standing against the world.

So Mu is the first and last gate, every practice feeds back into a deepening of Mu in this constant changing of the default setting. As an initial koan, Mu is the way Zen brings us to the point where we can burn through, melt through, dissolve into, return to our original self, original mind. That original self has no name, no beginning, no end, and no lack to be found in it.

Let me read you something and I will tell you afterwards who this is, unless you recognize it anyway from your reading.

‘The day after I called on you I was riding home on the train with my wife. I was reading a book on Zen... As the train was nearing Ofuma station I ran across this line, ‘I came to realize clearly that mind is no other than mountains and rivers and the great wide earth, the sun, the moon and the stars’, which are of course the words of Dogen. I had read this before but this time it impressed itself upon me so vividly that I was startled. I said to myself, after seven or eight years of zazen I finally see the essence of this statement. And I couldn’t suppress the tears that began to run off. At midnight I abruptly awakened. At first my mind was foggy, then suddenly that quotation flashed into my consciousness. ‘I came to realize clearly that mind was no other than mountains, rivers and the great wide earth, the sun and the moon and the stars.’ And I repeated it, then all at once I was struck as though by lightning and the next instant heaven and earth crumbled and disappeared. Instantaneously like surging waves a tremendous delight welled up in me, a veritable hurricane of delight, as I laughed loudly and wildly, ‘Ha ha ha ha, there’s no reasoning here, no reasoning at all, ha ha ha ha. The empty sky split in two then opened its enormous mouth and began to laugh uproariously, ‘HA HA HA HA’. Later one of the family members told me that my laughter sounded inhuman. I had come for enlightenment, Shakyamuni and the patriarchs had not deceived me. ‘They haven’t deceived me!’, I remember crying out.’

Now this happens to be the enlightenment experience recorded in Kapleau’s *Three Pillars of Zen* of our own ancestor in the dharma, Robert Aitken’s teacher, Yamada Koun. And you could say that this experience lies as the foundation of all of his teaching and life that followed. It is lovely that such an experience mainly lies quiet in the earth of practice, rather than making a lot of show, but it is also lovely sometimes to share the joy of someone who then molded Robert Aitken, who then molded the teachers who taught me. That resonates in me, just as Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment experience resonates through the waking up of countless generations of people since then. Every such experience is like a light that keeps picking us up as we sit here.

So I wouldn’t want to sell Mu short. It’s not as though you must strain to give birth to a similar experience. Every single experience of Mu is its own true matter, shaped entirely by your character and your style of sentience and imagination and heart. But don’t doubt the completeness, the thoroughness, the depth of what is at stake here. Don’t short-sell yourself.

It may be your way to walk into this slowly and profoundly as into a long deep shower of rain so fine you can hardly notice it, soaking you slowly all the way through to your bone marrow... Such a long slow walk preceded the moment Yamada records in his letter to his teacher. The ground is made fertile by practice before this can open with such depth and enduring power. What makes it fertile is not striving, driving, or pushing yourself towards something special, not at all. There is a long brewing process in our practice. We may think very little is happening at all but your faithful and ardent commitment to the Way, is always preparing the ground. It's like the action of water, always shaping the earth. It's not so much effort as a kind of strong intent of the heart. And at a certain point, exactly like a dog makes very clear, it involves taking a leap, pouncing, allowing the mind to radically turn about.

In this case the leap for Yamada Koun was that leap of deeply taking to heart and keeping close intimate company with those words of Dogen. He had been allowing these words to examine him thoroughly for a long time. And that's how the words of a koan can work on us. They rearrange us into their own mysterious image. We become like them in order to meet them. We meet the mind that spoke those words. When you work with Mu, you are not working on a problem called Mu, you are walking steadily to meet the mind of Zhaozhou. And everything conspires to help that meeting, exactly to the extent to which you make yourself meticulously available.

When Baso says, 'I have nothing to give you', he is actually giving Daiju something great. He is giving him back himself. He is giving him back the amplitude that already is Daiju and saying, 'Open the treasure that you are.' If he had said, 'I have something good to give you', he would have been a thief. He would have stolen the gift that Daiju already is.

The so-called second ancestor, Huike, is the one who stands in the snow outside Bodhidharma's cold cave and broken down temple as his way of saying I am not going away, I am just going to keep meticulously being here. When even that didn't get Bodhidharma to seem to respond, it is said that he cut off his arm. Legends like this are useful, we need that extra fuel in our tank. This did get Bodhidharma to accept him as genuine. 'My mind is not at rest. Please settle my mind for me,' begs Huike. Bodhidharma says, 'Go and bring me your mind and I will settle it for you.' When Huike finally comes back - and we can assume months, years, may have passed as Huike fiercely studied his own mind to grasp the ungraspable - he says, 'I have searched everywhere for my mind and I cannot find it

anywhere.’ Bodhidharma confirms him with these words: ‘There, I have already settled your mind.’

There is no mind as object ever to be located anywhere in this universe. Huike could not find any edge to his own mind, any handhold with which to seize it and wrestle it to the ground; which let him into the heart-settling open secret, that there is nothing, *nothing* outside it. No mind/universe seam. All he could find as his own mind was the great earth, the illimitable sky, the sun, the moon and the stars. That is no other than Huike, no other than you. Can you sense the nature of the peace that flows from that realization?

This is the offer of Mu, this word that cuts off simply the old endlessly repeated moves of the mind to claim a small safe and controlled stronghold for itself in a reality that it takes to be frightening and threatening to itself. And thereby misses out on life. So when Baso says, ‘I have nothing to give you,’ this is skillful means. Just like Bodhidharma’s, ‘Ah you need to settle your mind, OK go and get it and bring it to me and then I will settle it for you’, sending Huike onto the deep search to find the end of himself and finding nothing that he can call the end of himself. ‘To study the self is to forget the self.’ Dogen’s words track Huike’s search.

Somewhere I was delighted to read emptiness described as ‘graciousness’. When we say ‘empty’ we are pointing to the coming to a remarkable stop of all divided and dividing moves of heart and mind. And that is graciousness itself, and it is a graciousness that is extended to us constantly, in all that is.

This is the really interesting thing, that when we set out to offer the open, gracious-hearted mind of zazen and practice, and meet everything with an attention that does not cease from offering itself, then we really can touch and be touched by this *graciousness*. By extending it, we receive and become it. It’s true, no-one knows why we are so lucky. We don’t know why we are so lucky, that we have mountains and rivers and the great earth and the sun, the moon and the stars. We have frogs and bower birds eating the oranges constantly and we have life, we also have dogs and dogs have life and everything is so generously offering its own nature just as it is. Gracious to the point where the question of ‘Why?’ - the great dividing question in some ways, even though it can be such a rich question - can cut us off and strand us from the fact. In a way, in the kind of experience that you heard in the Yamada

koan, you were hearing 'Why' disappear. And it disappeared into the fact itself. There is nothing outside the fact itself, which somewhere someone called 'graciousness'.

Two final things, about what can fairly be called the truth of suffering. The first is that with the great reach of heart, of knowing that mind is no other than the mountains, the rivers, the great earth, the great wide earth and the sun and the moon and the stars, you must then come back to earth, to be of help. An experience like Yamada's had to slowly fall away, and ordinary workaday Tokyo reality came back. And as you come back into the ordinary world where all of us are born and die, you also have to find this unlimited reach of heart in your opening experience and see that this mind is also no other than the poor, the dispossessed, the poisoned river, the suffering earth, the sick, the marginalized, the tortured, the rejected and all of those parts of you as well. This is our ascetism.

Once a Benedictine monk was asked, 'What is your ascetism?' because looking at the Benedictine formation the person asking did not detect hair-shirts, only graciousness. The monk replied, 'Ah, community - *that* is our ascetism'. The practice of including, being able to include the whole great mix of all that is, including the broken human parts of the people around you and of all that is - that is our ascetism. That is what molds and brings forth the real gold, the compassionate dimension born of insight, of waking up. It is there incipiently in the moment we just explored. It needs to be drawn into and through a whole life, actualized as compassionate mind and heart. Or as the Metta Sutra put it, the act of radiating kindness towards what is and towards what you encounter. And *this* is the truth of suffering. The *facts* of suffering are plain enough. The *truth* of suffering is what is explored in this return phase of any opening of heart and mind. For as we see, they open together, open each other.

The second, is that zazen, Mu practice, the form that we practice in sesshin – these things need to stay as flexible and responsive and lightly born as the trees are in the wind. The breeze moving through the trees, the trees freely bending through the breeze, firm and fluid, with clear intent and easefulness at the same time. Because finally this Mu practice, this mind of Zen, this zazen is the action of love. Openness of mind is unsentimental, unsticky, unconditioned love. And this act, of becoming vulnerable and practising including, frankly will hurt, sometimes or often. A universe of unceasing change, that brings forth aware and

self-aware minds – hurts. And that may be the most subtle love letter we ever receive from the universe – that most deeply valuable informing and transforming *hurt*.

This is how Ikkyu saw it.

*Every day priests minutely examine the law  
and endlessly chant complicated sutras  
before doing that though  
they should learn the love letters sent by  
the wind and the rain  
the snow and the moon*

The American poet Billy Collins rounds off the invitation that Ikkyu made. The poem is called ‘Aimless Love’ – which seems to sum up quite well the strange and profound leisure inside the intensity of Zen practice, and its outcome.

This morning as I walked along the lake shore  
I fell in love with a wren  
and later in the day with a mouse the cat had dropped under the dining table.  
In the shadows of an autumn evening I fell for a seamstress  
still at her machine in the tailor’s window  
and later for a bowl of broth, steam rising like smoke from a naval battle.

This is the best kind of love, I thought,  
without recompense, without gifts or unkind words, without suspicion  
or silences on the telephone -  
the love of the chestnut,  
the jazz cap and the one hand on the wheel  
no lust, no slam of the door,  
the love of a miniature orange tree,  
the clean white shirt,  
the hot evening shower,  
no waiting no happiness or rancor -

Just a twinge every now and then for the wren that had built her nest  
just on a low branch overhanging the water  
and for the dead mouse still dressed in its light brown suit...

But my heart is always propped up in a field on its tripod  
ready for the next arrow.

After I carry the mouse by its tail  
to a pile of leaves in the woods  
I find myself standing at the bathroom sink,  
gazing down affectionately at the soap,  
so patient and soluble,  
so at home in its pale green soap dish.  
I can feel myself falling again  
as I felt its turning in my wet hands  
and caught the scent of lavender and the stove

So this matter of Mu, this matter of Prajna Paramita and the realization of this clear, direct mind of the heart. I remember when I first started chanting sutras, I vaguely that the great Prajna Paramita was most likely an extremely venerable bloke of some kind. Most great something's in the world as set up at present and through most of its history turn out to be blokes as we know - very important blokes, to be revered everywhere under the sun... But no, the Prajna Paramita is not that at all. As people of the way you will spend your life truly investigating and realizing this Prajna, and 'Paramita' means simply 'completeness of, perfection of'.

So luckily the Great Prajna Paramita is not an old gent at all, but the fire that runs through all things. Lice, dead or alive, soap in the dish, each of us and all of this is the fire that we join when we open. It is the fire that burns equally in the born and the unborn in every one of us.

So, lucky to be here, don't you think?

**ZEN OPEN CIRCLE AUTUMN SESSHIN 2012,**

**CLOUD MOUNTAIN, NSW, DAY 2**

**SUSAN MURPHY ROSHI**