

## **The Tiger's Cave**

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### **The tiger's cave, tangling eyebrows with zen masters; Bill Oddie's friend & the tiger; the compassion of the Masters; the lion and the bull**

So we've called this retreat – I'm told it's one of the longest ever titles of a retreat – *Entering the Tiger's Cave: Tangling Eyebrows with Zen Masters*. It was my idea to have a retreat on this theme, and I must admit that I must have been out of my mind [audience laughter] when I suggested the theme to Padmadaka. What was I thinking? Well, I wasn't thinking, particularly. Padmadaka kept asking, "Well, what's the theme going to be?" and in the end I said, "Well, we'll just do it on this sort of thing... like that." Not quite sure, not quite clear, what that would mean.

So, what was I thinking when I suggested that we devote ourselves this winter to a search for the tiger's cave, the tiger's lair, the abode of the Zen master? Human footprints lead there, but no human footprints are coming out. Men have gone in, but apparently no men have returned. They've disappeared, presumably consumed by the tiger. To liken the Zen master to a tiger is very striking indeed. As you all know, tigers are immensely powerful. Dangerous - immensely dangerous, incredibly dangerous. Huge. Also incredibly beautiful; orange and black, with incredible eyes. Huge, prowling with immense dignity. Tremendously agile when they move. Marvelously tranquil when lying at ease with all that latent power. So, it's quite something to liken the Zen master to the tiger in his cave.

And this was brought home to me quite strongly a few weeks ago. I was visiting my mum and there's a lot of TV on, and fortunately there were quite a few natural history programmes, which I find are often the best programmes to watch. And this one was about Bill Oddie – the ex-Goodie, for those of you who know that, but who's now a quite respected natural history person. And he'd gone to the Jim Corbett National Park in northern India - this incredible jungle, which has been preserved – and he was going there looking for tigers. But he was *incredibly* shaky and nervous. He wanted to see a tiger, but he was very, very nervous about it, and eventually he told this story, a story of a friend of his who, many years before, had been visiting and walking around the park with a guide and a party. And as they were going back to the camp they saw huge paw prints in the mud, and the guide said, "It's a tiger, and the tiger's nearby." So, they were going back to the camp, and Bill Oddie's friend said, "I want to go back and take a photo of a particular bird. Quite a common bird. I noticed one, I want to go and photo the bird." So he went back and suddenly the guide and the party heard this cry and shout and they ran back and they found Bill Oddie's friend dead in a clearing, mauled by a tiger.

What was peculiar was when he was taken home and they brought home his effects, they developed his film from the camera, and the last shots on the film are of the tiger coming out of the jungle, walking around the clearing – he's taking shot after shot. The last shot is of this huge face, the mouth open, the paws up. That was the last shot. You didn't see the photos, he described it incredibly vividly, but that was the last thing he did. It was extraordinary hearing him relate this tale. And Bill Oddie thought that his friend had actually returned not to photograph this bird, but to photograph the tiger. He really had courted danger, and he didn't return, but you have this weird photographic record.

So, Bill Oddie was actually very scared, but obviously fascinated too. He obviously wanted to see a tiger, but terrified at the same time; going around on elephants and they see the remains of carcasses where tigers have been, you know, deer and so on. And at the end of his stay, at the end of his visit, there's a kind of disturbance and a tiger's come up to the compound. And then you just see a shot of this tiger in the distance, in the grass, walking away. The way they move, the way they walk, is just so incredibly beautiful. Fascinating and dangerous, and he was really stirred up by this. So, when you start likening a Zen master to a tiger - and of course the Chinese knew what tigers were, knew what they could do - well you're making a very strong statement indeed.

And, of course, this sort of fascination and this sense of danger can be like that for us in the spiritual life, in the Buddhist life. Maybe even you feel this way about this retreat. This retreat may have seemed fascinating to you, you're drawn to it, you feel that there's something that you need here. Whether or not you noticed it was on Zen masters, you felt, "Well, there could be something very good here, something important." But maybe at the same time it's a little bit scary too. I know people sometimes feel that way when they come on retreat, come to Padmaloka. They're kind of attracted, but a bit scared at the same time. There's all those new people, maybe weird people, there. You know, and you're doing all that practice, living in a different way. It's kind of attractive, but at the same time feels a bit dangerous. And I have to admit, I feel a bit that way myself when it comes to retreats, even though I've been doing these things for years and years and years. I feel that way myself – very attracted, very interested too. Particularly following a theme like this, where I'm a little bit out of my usual areas of thought, let's say. And I'm going to be meeting new people, different people.

I don't quite know where we're going. I've got an intuition where I want to go, and I've got a practice, but I don't know what I or what you will be entering. But nonetheless, perhaps for that very reason, I want to go into it. I want to go towards the tiger's cave, go towards the tiger, follow the footprints that don't return. Yes. So for some of you it might come as something of a surprise that the Zen masters of India, China, Korea and Japan are likened to tigers and that their abode, their state, if you like, is the tiger's cave.

The enlightened master a tiger? Surely an enlightened man should be likened to something a bit more gentle, like a dove or a lamb, or something docile and nice and warm and cuddly. You know, like a good dog, a nice Retriever or Labrador, always pleasant. Or maybe a Saint Bernard or something. The perfect father or mother, perhaps; always understanding, always sympathetic no matter what we do, no matter

what we get up to, always there for us to stroke and caress. Certainly, the enlightened man, the awakened man in Buddhist tradition of all schools is always said to be a man of genuine love and compassion - of genuine empathy, of real love and compassion, the love and compassion that springs from wisdom. That is the same, in fact, as wisdom. But we need to take care when we hear this, that the enlightened man is a man of love and compassion. We need to take care that we don't confuse the loving-kindness of an enlightened master with what passes for love and compassion in ordinary life, which is so often more like pity and sentimentality. Something that indulges our every whim and fancy, and that in fact shields us from reality, shields us from ourselves. The teachings of the enlightened ones, the awakened ones, do not shield us or comfort us. In the end they bring us to the way things are. That is what true love and compassion does – it brings you to what you are and what's actually going on. If you want an illustration of this, there's a very, very good film which we saw the other night in the community called *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter... and Spring* which is a genuinely Buddhist film set in Korea about a Korean Zen master and his young charge, and you really get the impression of what real love and compassion is.

So, for this reason, because we're not talking about sentiment and pity, the Buddha is frequently likened to powerful beasts. He's likened to a lion, traditionally the king of beasts, and his teaching is said to be "the lion's roar." Traditionally when the lion roars the other animals are silent. So, the Buddha's proclamation of truth silences our opinionatedness, silences our false views, silences our petty-mindedness, opens up a *vast* silence that calls us to walk into it and look at ourselves - look at our life - as it is.

Sometimes the Buddha is likened to the great bull elephant, or just the "Great Bull." Last summer I was really delighted, we were walking in one of the fields down the road by the river, there were all the cows and calves coming towards me and then I realized that behind them there was this *huge* bull, a great dung-colored bull, beautiful creature, and he just kind of moved through the crowd of cows and calves with such dignity and power, all in there in every sinew, a really impressive beast. And, well, we moved through the field pretty quickly, I can tell you. [Laughter]

Hakuin, the great Zen master of 18<sup>th</sup> century Japan, one of his disciples once said, "Our master moved like a bull and glared like a tiger." And Buddhist training is sometimes likened to training the bull. We are the bull, or our mind is the bull, which is to say the same, that we are the bull. And in Zen tradition you get the famous bull-herding or ox-herding pictures. And here you have this very lovely set of pictures and verses. And our mind is likened to a wild bull that's gone astray, that's just all over the place. We need to find that bull, tame that bull. We need, in other words, to tame all that energy, power and strength. The mind is regarded as incredibly powerful, incredibly creative, and by mind we don't just mean what's "up there," we mean "us," our whole being. So, you need to find the bull and tame it. So it expresses awakening, expresses enlightenment. And there's one picture that does occur to me that's incredibly evocative, where the ox-herd, the bull-herd is sitting on the back of the bull playing a flute, really happily going along, gamboling along. The energy isn't repressed - it's tamed, channelled, harnessed into endless creativity.

## **Taming the tiger; an intense and risky exchange; Huang Po, Iron Grindstone Myu and Tu Tzu**

Bhante Sangharakshita, our teacher, the founder of our Order, speaks of the tiger's cave as the symbol, the image, for what's called *Maha Sunyata*, great emptiness – the great emptiness which is the realisation of non-duality. All distinctions between self and other, this and that, likes and dislikes, *samsara* and *nirvana*, worldly and spiritual, are utterly consumed, utterly dissolved. Sangharakshita says this is the Great Void, because even the most spiritual of us are afraid of disappearing into it. We want to cling on to our dualistic way of thinking - self and others, this and that. But eventually they must all go. The great emptiness is like the tiger's cave: many tracks lead into it, but none come out.

Ultimately, your fear of it is also the reason you want to go into the great emptiness, because you and your fear will never come out. It swallows up every product of our dualistic vision. So, here we get some of the motive for going into that tiger's cave. Our fear - which is a symptom of our self-centredness, our self-clinging, our self-protection - that self-centredness, that egotism if you like, is such a burden. Padmadaka said very generously that I'm not self-preoccupied, but I can assure you I am, because I experience that self-preoccupation as a great weight. Self-preoccupation, a kind of burden of our egotism, it really does weigh us down. It gets in the way. It limits our freedom, our creativity. When we enter the tiger's cave, yes, we disappear, but in another sense we reappear. We're reborn, we're recreated. And you could actually characterize the spiritual life in these terms. It's not that there's going to be one cataclysmic disillusion in the tiger's cave and then a wonderful rebirth, it's happening all the time. A process of dissolving and renewing.

Sometimes people complain that they don't feel free. They don't feel satisfied, that they're not living creatively, that they're not living deeply enough. And often we come up with all kinds of reasons for this – it's our upbringing, it's the government, it's the state, it's other people, it's him, it's her – above all, it's *Them*. It's somebody else's fault that I'm not free, that I'm not satisfied, that I'm not creative. But that is *never* the Buddhist analysis. It's never the Buddha's analysis. The final Buddhist analysis is that it's you, that it's me. That's why we aren't creative, that's why we aren't free. Because we're just so stuck in ourselves.

The great Zen teacher Yunmen was once asked by a disciple, "What's the problem?" Somebody just went up to him, "What's the problem?" Meaning, what's my problem? What's the problem of life? What's the problem of existence? Why is there suffering? But he just said, "What's the problem?" And Yunmen was very direct - famous for *very* direct, turning, pivotal words, as they called them, words that can really bring about a transformation, very straightforward. And he said, "What's the problem? You don't know the stench of your own shit!" [Laughter] Really drastic, direct. But, of course, telling the monk "You don't know that self-centredness, selfishness *really stinks*." It really does stink. When something is stuck, when something doesn't move, when

something doesn't flow, it stinks. Go out to a nature reserve. See the stagnant pools of water. They stink. They really stink, because the water doesn't flow. When we fix ourselves, when we limit ourselves, we start to stink. The problem is, we don't know that we stink.

### **The Great Emptiness; self preoccupation; Yunmen**

And in the Zen tradition, yes, we find the Zen adept, the Zen master, likened to a tiger. A Zen adept is described as one who is able to meet and to wrestle with tigers, can even capture tigers, who's able to go up to a tiger, look him in the eyes and even pull the tiger's whiskers. There's a lovely story from the Zen tradition of an Emperor who has a tiger, you know, he's got a tiger and he's got it in a cage and it's one of his pets. And he asks one of his samurai to go in and train it, without a sword. So the samurai goes in with his fan and does all this stuff. And yes, the tiger is kind of all right with that, although the samurai is sweating and very frightened. But then the Zen master goes in, and he doesn't do anything. And the tiger is completely calm and at ease, and the samurai says, well, you have to know that Zen is always superior to samurai.

But these metaphors of going up to the tiger, capturing tigers, pulling their whiskers, looking into their eyes – these metaphors describe the way in which Zen practitioners communicate with the Zen master. When you meet a Zen master, according to the tradition, you don't meet him for a pleasant chat about Buddhist philosophy over a cup of tea. You don't meet him to kind of talk about your problems. You don't meet up to kind of have witty conversations with all sorts of Zen talk about (the idea) that neither of you are really there. The meeting is an intense and risky exchange, an exchange where the only thing that matters is Enlightenment, is awakening. An exchange where anything at all could happen. Anything can happen because the Zen master just doesn't care what he does to bring you to realisation. He's not bothered whether you like him. He's not bothered whether you're going to be offended by him. All he's concerned about is to wake you up, to bring you to realisation. And you're fully prepared for that. You're prepared to meet him in that spirit, to meet him in that way.

This kind of exchange, this kind of meeting in the tiger's cave, is brought out especially in the great Chinese collections of stories and sayings of the great masters, particularly the *Blue Cliff Record* and the *Gateless Gate*. You have these very short stories about weird encounters between Zen masters and Zen masters and their disciples. I hope to refer to these a bit more in the course of the retreat, but let me just give you some of the descriptions from the *Blue Cliff Record* of some Zen masters, just some of the particular ones, and then more general descriptions. Just try and get a feeling for what these guys are like. It gives you perhaps quite a different impression of what an awakened being is like and what spiritual life is like.

One of my favorites is the great Huang Po, who was seven feet tall. On his forehead there was a lump like a round pearl. He understood Zen by nature. The light in his eyes pierced people. Well, imagine coming into the shrine room with Huang Po leading the

meditations and perhaps striding around, making sure you're sitting properly. Or there's the nun, a woman Zen master, known as Iron Grindstone Liu. Iron Grindstone Liu, what a name. You can picture her, can't you, a really rugged woman. And it's said of her that she was like a stone-struck spark, like a lightning flash. Hesitate and you lose your body and your life. Imagine meeting somebody like that. She was also said to have an active edge that was sharp and dangerous. That's a wonderful saying. And there's Tu Tzu - if there are any Chinese or Japanese or Korean scholars here, or any who've been there, forgive my pronunciation - who was plain and truthful. Whenever a question was put to him you saw his guts as soon as he opened his mouth. Without any superfluous effort, he would immediately cut off the questioner's tongue. Don't take that literally.

And then there's more general descriptions of the master, the adept.

*"He overturns the polar star and reverses the earth, the axis. He captures tigers and rhinos, distinguishes dragons from snakes. One must be a lively-acting fellow in our school."*

And then,

*"Cut through nails and shear through iron, then you can be a genuine master of our school. If you run away from arrows, how could you possibly be a competent adept?"*

And finally,

*"A member of our school can kill a man's false understanding in the blink of an eye."*

So, I think you can get a picture of what these characters are like. The Zen masters live to cut through the nails and shear through the iron of our false understanding and our restricting habits - the things that keep us in a state of restriction and limitation and pain. They wield, they say, the jewel sword of the diamond king - the sword of transcendental wisdom, the sword that destroys but is also said to be the sword that gives life. They are themselves this sword of wisdom and compassion. They cut down your false understanding only so you can develop in wisdom. So, searching for the tiger's cave, searching for the tiger, is dangerous. But it is also, of course, the entrance into liberation, the entrance into boundless freedom.

### **Loosening up; beginner's mind; making the most of the moment**

So, searching for the tiger's cave, entering the tiger's cave means, to start with, just loosening up, freeing up. Freeing up our fixed ideas about ourselves. This is what we're going to be doing on the retreat through our meditation, our discussion groups, our workshops, just relaxing with one another, through yoga, through doing the washing up. We're just going to be dissolving - slowly, gently - our rigidities, our fixedness. Just trying to get more of a flow in our lives. A flow between ourselves and others, a flow between ourselves and life. Maybe we won't experience the Great Emptiness. But if we

begin to loosen - if we begin to take out some of those pegs, those nails, cut through that iron that holds us in and holds us down - then that will be a very wonderful thing. If we just start to do that just a little bit, that's a very wonderful thing. So approach this retreat in a fresh and open way.

If you're new to things at Padmaloka, if you're new to Padmaloka, even if you're new to Buddhism, that is a really wonderful thing. That's a great thing, really treasure that, because you're going to be so fresh and open. You won't be burdened with ideas and expectations. You'll have what the Zen people call "the beginner's mind." The beginner's mind is a really wonderful thing. The first time I meditated I was just so, well, excited. The first time I went to a class, just so excited. Look, anything can happen here, anything is possible. And a sense of real potential and possibility. I remember after I was ordained as well, this feeling of "Anything could happen." Anything could arise from now on. And, you know, it was such a fresh experience that in a way, looking back, you get burdened by knowledge, burdened by ideas. So keep that freshness, that fresh approach. You're in a very strong position if you're new to things.

But those of us who have been around for a while, we too need to cultivate that fresh beginner's mind. It's so easy to get jaded. It's so easy to think that we know about Buddhism, "I've been practicing Buddhism for thirty years. I know what Buddhism's about. I know what the Dharma's about. I've been on loads of retreats, I know what retreats are. I know who we are. I know who I am. I know what others are like." Really work on dropping that. Let it go. Be a beginner again. We're all beginners.

Actually, we're all beginners all the time. This moment, right now, has never occurred before. Actually, it's never going to happen again. I've actually never spoken to any of you before. *None of you* have I spoken to before. None of you have listened to me before. I've never given a talk before. Every moment, according to tradition, is completely unique. We're all completely different in this moment. Every moment brims with immense possibility, so try to see it like that. Try to see things in a fresh and open way. Maybe then we can just have some little sense of what it's like to be in the tiger's cave. As I said last night, quoting Dogen, "You are only alive right now." So make the most of every moment. Don't allow each moment to be burdened and weighed down by the habits of the past and all the expectations of the future. Try to let go of all that. So, if we can loosen like this, it will be a really wonderful thing.

### **Pseudo-Zen games; what does 'Zen' mean? Dhyana; meditation and wisdom not separate; conditions for practice**

One thing we won't be doing on this retreat is playing pseudo-Zen games. I want us, above all else, to enjoy ourselves, but let's none of us pretend to be Zen masters. You even find in the tradition, you know, criticism of this, you know, they'll have a discussion of a particular exchange between master and disciple, and the commentator will say, well, "Nowadays people put a glare in their eyes and they shout at people,

thinking that they're Zen masters." So, even this was going on in the seventh century, in the eighth century, that there's this kind of false Zen.

So, we won't be doing any of that. We won't be doing any weird things and calling it Zen. Of course, if the weird things naturally arise, that's a different thing. And in fact this word Zen, these days, covers a real multitude of sins - weird behavior, it must be Zen. Minimal design must be Zen. I sometimes hear it on arts programs. I was listening a few months ago to a discussion of a play, and the reviewers are saying, "It's very Zen, very Zen." Well, it's got nothing to do with Zen. It's just very minimal. But, it's got nothing to do with Zen.

Sometimes Zen is presented as something sort of separate from Buddhism, even superior to Buddhism. But this, of course, is not how the Zen tradition sees itself. It sees itself as continuing and developing Buddhism as taught by the Buddha and developed in India. And you get some idea of this from the actual meaning of the word "Zen," we've all heard this word Zen, but what does it actually mean? Well, the word "Zen" is the Japanese attempt to pronounce the Chinese word "Ch'an." And "Ch'an" itself is the Chinese attempt to pronounce the Indian Sanskrit word "Dhyana." So, you've got "Dhyana," "Ch'an," Zen." "Dhyana" - India, "Ch'an" - China, "Zen" - Japan. You've also got (Korea) - you mustn't miss out on Korea, because Korea is very important in the development of Zen - the word there is "Sun." I think that's how you say it.

So, *dhyana* means "meditation." Meditation not in the sense of attempting to concentrate, which is what we're doing most of the time - that's *bhavana*. Attempting to concentrate or develop a particular quality. *Dhyana* means absorption. The mind thoroughly saturated in a higher or a deeper - whatever metaphor you prefer - a higher or deeper consciousness, a more profound level of being. It's a highly-concentrated, integrated state where you're at ease, blissful, clear, and you have a sense of your consciousness expanding and softening. And in classical Indian Buddhist tradition, different *dhyanas* are distinguished, higher levels of consciousness. Some of which have no discursive thought whatsoever; all that restless mental activity has completely subsided and there's this deep, profound concentration and presence.

And of course it's very important to have this experience - a sense that through your meditation you are deepening your concentration, you are becoming more integrated, that your consciousness is expanding, that there's greater clarity and awareness, greater happiness, greater satisfaction. Very important here, when we talk about this, it's not about straining to get something. I think when I was first meditating I thought, "Gotta get into *dhyana*, gotta squeeze myself into *dhyana*, get that *dhyana*!" And of course that's completely self-defeating. You're not trying to grab and get anything, you just practice and let things unfold, and let that deepening concentration and happiness and clarity just naturally unfold. *Dhyana*, though, is not the end of spiritual life. *Dhyana* can be gained and it can be lost. It's not a permanent attainment. We notice this in our experience, that we can be going along very, very nicely - flowing very well where, you know, things are coming together - and then suddenly something happens and we're just completely



thrown. Completely thrown and then we're all over the place. So, it's not a permanent attainment.

For a permanent attainment we need wisdom, *prajna*. Seeing things as they really are. Your concentrated, positive mind enables you to see into your life, into yourself, into the way things are. And at some point there's a direct, face-to-face realization; a realization, say, of the impermanence of all things, the flow, the changing nature of all things. A realization that there are no differences between yourself and others, that nowhere are there fixed and separate entities at all. You have a sense of things interpenetrating with one another. Here, *dhyana* and *prajna* come together. Your profound meditation and your clear seeing are not different. This is a very important point that is brought out particularly by the great sixth patriarch of Chinese Ch'an/Zen Buddhism, Hui Neng, where he says that, "Meditation and Wisdom are not different. Meditation is the lamp, *Prajna* is the light. They're not separable." This is a very, very important teaching with a lot of ramifications, which I'd like to explore a bit later on.

So the Ch'an school, the Zen school, is referring to meditation in this highest sense. The aim is to experience the way things are directly through meditation. And in this sense, Ch'an and Zen is no different at all from any other major Buddhist tradition. The aim of all major Buddhist schools is to attain reality through meditation. And for that to happen, of course you need other things as well. You need ethical practice – observance of the Buddhist precepts, you need study of the Buddhist scriptures, you need devotional practice, you need spiritual friendship, a simple life, serving others, even work, participation in the arts, and so on. You need all these things – a total life – to bring you to realization.

### **Cha'an and Zen as Total Buddhist Practice**

So Ch'an and Zen is no exception to this tradition. In Ch'an and Zen there's a great emphasis on ethical practice. There's study of the scriptures. Sometimes people think in Zen you don't study, you don't have to think. Well that's a travesty of the tradition. There is study, real study. Not "head" study, but "being" study. There's devotional practice, there's spiritual friendship. There's definitely the arts. Ch'an and Zen are extraordinarily rich in the arts of painting, calligraphy, poetry, sculpture, drama even. And music – there's one school, in fact, based on flute playing. The master was a flute player, a flautist, and it's referred to in the tradition. Noh drama is very, very strongly influenced by Zen realization.

And there's work as well. "*A day of no working is a day of no eating,*" said the great Pai Chang. Cooking as spiritual practice - Dogen's famous instructions to the cook. And there's a deep commitment in the Ch'an and Zen tradition to what's called the Bodhisattva Path - that you're doing all this, that you're practicing the Way of Enlightenment, for the benefit of all. You want to help others. So it's all there in the Ch'an and Zen tradition, they're all expressions of meditation and wisdom. Dogen says,

and we'll look at this point a bit later, "*Practice is Enlightenment. Enlightenment is practice.*" So Ch'an and Zen are about total Buddhist practice.