Great Doubt

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01 Mind and the Alaya; Chao Chu; 'Lip Cha'an'; Does a dog have Buddha Nature?

So, yesterday I spoke a lot about mind and about consciousness. I spoke about the system of consciousness as depicted in the Lankavatara Sutra and the Yogachara tradition. I hope that from that very brief and rather simplistic look at that material that one thing became clear – and that is just how important and how central mind is. That it's mind that needs attention, mind that needs looking into. And in the end it's about waking up to the truth that there is only mind. A radiant, non-dual awareness in which there are no distinctions at all between self and other, self and things, between Buddhas and beings. And I spoke as well about Dogen's brilliant insight into this as an intimacy.

Of course, this is only manner of speaking, this sort of language. It can be misunderstood when you talk about mind. If you looked into it, you'd never find this mind. It's empty, pure, still, unfathomably deep, a mystery. We also saw that to reach this state - to wake up to this - that it's not just about going around with some intellectual idea of non-duality. To reach this you need deep and continuous practice. You need to be dropping into the river, the ocean, of the store-consciousness, into the *alaya*, the seeds of skilful creative energies. These skilful and creative energies need to perfume the alaya with the sweet scents of spiritual practice. This is what spiritual life is about - day-to-day, moment-by-moment practice, whether on or off the cushion, maintaining skilful states. It's the only way. It's the only way to be, it's the only way to practice. It's the only way to reach what's called "the revolution in the basis." The utter turning around of consciousness, when all the impure seeds are utterly purified there's that realization of non-dual awareness.

So keep that in mind, as the sort of backdrop, as I tell you a very famous story from the Zen tradition. And the story goes back to sometime in the ninth century and centers around the great Ch'an master Chao Chu - Joshu in Japanese. And Chao Chu's own life was one of almost constant travel. He visited over eighty of the great disciples of the great master Ma-tsu. Chao Chu being Nan-chuan. You probably remember the story of Nan-chuan and the cat, when some monks were all fighting over a cat and Nan-chuan turned up and cut the cat in half, which is another one of those koans. Was he being unskilful? Don't need to get bogged down in that. Anyway. Even after Chao Chu's awakening he kept travelling, studying, and practicing. And moving about. He was a real foot-travelling patch-robe monk, as they call it, a real Ch'an traveller.

And he finally settled down if you can call it that, at the age of eighty in the Kwan-Yin temple of Chao Chu. Hence his name, Chao Chu. Very often these masters take their

name from the place in which they're associated. So he settled down in Chao Chu in northern China. And it's said that he taught for another forty years, only passing away at the age of 120. And he was famous for his asceticism. He really though austerity was the way. He wanted to emulate the ancient Buddhist monks in his monastery. There was no personal storage space. I know sometimes people, when they come to Padmaloka, think, "Hmm, not much storage place to put my stuff." Well, in this place there was no storage space at all. You just had your robes and you had your basic possessions. The food was strictly vegetarian.

One day Master Chao Chu's chair broke – the rope chair that he'd used for many many years, it was very very old – and he just found a bit of firewood and just lashed a bit of firewood to the broken stump. So he just sat on this rickety old chair when people would come to see him. And of course his disciples wanted to make him a nice new one and he said, "No. This is fine. This is my chair."

And everybody worked each day in Chao Chu's monastery in the fields or doing some construction, or cleaning, cooking, that kind of thing. This is the old Ch'an tradition. The Ch'an monasteries were independent. That's one of the reasons why they avoided the various persecutions that went through the Chinese history of Buddhism. The Ch'an monasteries tended to avoid that because they were isolated and because they were self-supporting, which I think is a real message. So, they did intensive practice and work – work as practice.

Anyway, one day old Chou Chu found a monk sort of skiving off, he found him round the back of the shrine hall. And Chou Chu asked him – you can imagine the response of the monk seeing the old boy coming round – "where have all the virtuous ones gone?" Meaning the other monks in the community. And the monk said, "They're working in the fields." Chou Chu took his knife, which he used for work, from his sleeve and he gave it to the monk and said, "My tasks as abbot are many. I ask you to cut off my head. I'm weary." And the monk ran off, terrified.

He was a great teacher, apparently, and he had many disciples. And his manner of teaching is described as "lip Ch'an." Not Mouth Ch'an, not just talking about it, but it was lip Ch'an because a light issued from his lips. His words would just light you up. And the texts say that he didn't hit and beat like some masters, thankfully. He would only just use a few words to bring people to awakening. It's said, in fact – this is a lovely expression – he used flavourless words. Plain. Words that you can't get a hold or a handle on. And the great Yuan Wu says of Chou Chu, "A very capable teacher of our clan. He does not discuss the obstruse or mysterious. He always deals with people in terms of the fundamental matter."

One day a monk came to him and there was something on this monk's mind. This monk had been seriously practicing for a long time. He was practicing the Precepts, he'd been meditating for a long time, studied the scriptures – the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the *Sutra of Hui Neng*, the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. He was thoroughly imbued with the Dharma, with notions like the mutual interpenetration of all phenomena, like emptiness,

like the Buddha-nature in all things and all beings. Very important. He had great faith in that, great faith in himself, great faith that there was this Buddha-nature and that you could awaken to that nature.

Anyway, one day he was looking at the dogs that would hang around the monastery, the strays that would scavenge around. And they weren't pretty, of course. Flea-ridden, diseased-looking creatures, scratching around, always hungry, always fighting, some of them cowering and pathetic. You see if you go to India, to our retreat centres, there's always a pack of dogs around the retreat centre wanting scraps and they really are sorry-looking creatures, some of them. And the monk began to wonder, looking at these creatures fighting and mating and cowering, "Do they have Buddha-nature? Does that dog have Buddha-nature?" He was told everything does, but how could they? So there's a kind of doubt.

So he went to Chou Chu, went to his abbot, went to his teacher, and thought, "He'll surely resolve this doubt, he'll sort it out for me." Because he had great faith in Chou Chu. Enormous faith, if not more faith in Chou Chu than all the scriptures and all that. It was his teacher. So, he went to see the old man, this plain and simple old man with his lined face and his simple robe sitting on his rickety chair, sitting with so much dignity. And the monk felt, of course, great reverence and awe in relation to Chou Chu, so he asked, "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?"

And Chou Chu just said, "No." Just like that. Flavourless word - a flat, plain, flavourless "no." The monk was totally shocked. "No? Just that?" And looking at Chou Chu he knew that the interview was over. Finished. Ended. He'd shut up shop. Flavourless. It ended with no. "Wu" in Chinese. "Mu" in Japanese. "No."

02 The Great Doubt; mundane doubt and confusion; growing up and building character

Now it must have really thrown that monk into utter confusion. He now had a big, a massive, problem. The teachings said everything has Buddha-nature. He had great faith in that. He lived to bring that forth. And now his teacher who he had great faith in, Chou Chu, has said plainly that a dog did not have Buddha-nature.

So, he must have been thrown into a great abyss, a great doubt – **the** Great Doubt. Living now with this contradiction. The scriptures say everything has Buddha-nature. Chao Chu says a dog does not have Buddha-nature. If a dog doesn't have Buddha-nature, what else doesn't have Buddha-nature? Maybe I don't have Buddha-nature. So he was really thrown back on himself. And in time, as you can imagine in a community like that, the word got around about this exchange. The monk talked about it – he was in crisis, maybe he even reported in about it. [Laughter] Maybe they had reporting in in those days. So maybe a number of people were stirred up.

So another monk, a bold monk, he went to Chou Chu, "I'll sort this out." So again we're in the abbot's room, the old venerable on his rickety chair, and the monk says, "Does everything have Buddha-nature?" And Chou Chu said, "Yes." Again, flat, plain, flavourless. "Yes." Great! It's resolved. And the monk could see that the interview wasn't ended. Maybe he could go further, so he said, "Master, do you have Buddha-nature?" And Chou Chu said, "No." A flavourless "no." End of interview. It's finished. He's shut up shop again. So you can imagine the community must have been thrown into great confusion.

And this is a very interesting story. I was reflecting on it. It does happen. I can think back to periods in the Order's history, with Sangharakshita, he would say something on a seminar. Something like we all need to enter the greater mandala of uselessness and not worry too much about working for the movement and doing things and all that sort of thing. And people were coming back from the seminar and saying, "Bhante said we should just all relax." And of course the really dynamic people would say, "What?" You know, they'd been told to really go for it. So somebody would go to Bhante and ask, "Did you say…" and he'd say something else which would be another take entirely and things would be stirred up like that. It was a bit, in some ways, like a Ch'an master, throwing you back on yourself all the time. It's a very interesting, fascinating teaching method. I'm sure educationalists would be interested in all this.

But what interests me right now, what I want to talk about now is the fact that Chou Chu gave his disciples problems – irresolvable paradoxes. Apparently irresolvable paradoxes, irresolvable on their own level. He gave them that to meditate on, and they were real for those practitioners. It doesn't sound like they would be real problems for us, but for them they were real issues. If you were a serious devoted monk in 9th-century China, to be told by someone you venerate that a dog didn't have Buddha-nature was a massive shock – a massive problem. A problem that demanded that you dig deeper into your spiritual practice to resolve and to see into it. And Chou Chu of course knew this would happen. He'd trained himself like that. His teachers had taught him like that. His teaching, his community, his practice, was designed to bring up these deep existential problems – to actually create doubt. That's what he wanted to do.

Now – let's be very clear – by doubt we don't mean that psychological state of chronic confusion where you can't make up your mind. You don't know whether to get up or lie in bed. We're not talking about that. These guys in the monastery got up every day and meditated. They engaged. They were committed to spiritual life. So, we're not talking about that state of chronic confusion where we don't know whether to get up or stay in bed. "I don't know whether to do this job or that job, I don't know to have this relationship. Shall I have her? Shall I have him? I don't know whether to live a spiritual life or become a computer programmer. I don't know whether to be an artist or a bank manager. Maybe I could write a novel. Or go on holiday." That state of utter confusion that's generated by not seeing and not wanting to see what life is actually for. Not actually living life as it should be led. Just keeping your options open, drifting along in a confused sort of way. In a way, never growing up. That's what this sort of doubt is, it's a state of protracted adolescence, and it's very unhealthy after a certain age. Reasonable

up to about, hmmm… I dunno [Laughter] let's not put an age on it. But after a certain age I think it's very unhealthy. Just that protracted adolescence.

I remember once Sangharakshita, my teacher, telling me when I reached a certain point. And I was very active and I was very committed to the spiritual life, but there was in me a certain passivity in relation to certain people and situations and I was sort of going along in a situation without really doing it for myself. And I asked him what I should do and he said, "Well, what are you thinking of doing?" He's never tell you. And I said, "I thought I'd just stay here." And he said, "I don't think that would be a good idea. Single men need to make sure that they grow up. If you're married and have children you have to grow up. You have to mature, you have put food on the table. There's people dependent upon on you. You have a purpose in life. But single men have to be really careful that they grow up." And he really urged me to take responsibility for myself. He said, "It doesn't matter what you do. You could become a hermit. You could write a book. You could start a centre. But make sure you're doing it from yourself – that you really commit yourself to something and that you see things through in relation to other people, that you really take responsibility." So really really watch for this if you're a young, single man. Make sure you don't have a kind of protracted adolescence. It's very sad. I know people, friends of mine in their fifties and sixties, and they haven't sussed this out. They're still adolescent. And that is really tragic. Sorry to be heavy, but I really think this is true and we have to watch it.

This is the great thing about Buddhist discipline, Buddhist practice, Buddhist application – that you do it even though you don't feel like doing it. You know, you get up and you practice even though you know at that moment there seems to be nothing in it. There's no pleasure in it. You don't seem to be getting anywhere. But it's good to do it. It builds character. This morning - just so you don't feel alone, some of you – my meditation was appalling. I didn't sleep very well last night. Um, I don't want your sympathy. [Laughter] My back was hurting, I kept falling asleep, I was spending most of the time just staring at Suvarnagarbha's blue t-shirt, just trying to stay awake, and part of me is thinking, "Why are you doing it?" Well, I've gotta do it, because I've got to ring the bells, [Laughter] so I can hardly leave the shrine room, but there's a great sense of building character. It isn't about being a bliss bunny, you know, and just having a groovy time. It's about digging in and developing something deeper. Anyway, I think I've made my point.

03 Doubt from faith; materialist versus religious world view; spiritual life without God; the dialectic between Great Faith and Great Doubt

So, we're not talking about that state of chronic confusion. That sort of shilly-shallying. It doesn't matter whether you become a Buddhist or not – but really make sure you do something with your life.

We are talking about the doubt that Chao Chu and his disciples create, because they all create it (it's a community and a communication). That doubt arising out of a deep commitment to spiritual life borne of a genuine faith and commitment. This faith is not

belief, it's not dogmatic adherence. This faith is an intuition, a sense, even an insight and a vision of what is possible. A vision of Buddha-nature, even. You sense that there is something profound and mysterious to discover, to unfold, to become, to be. So you commit yourself to the path of practice. And you keep going, even when you're not in contact with that initial vision. You keep faith with it.

But this very faith, this very practice, generates doubt - in the sense of a deep questioning of your life and your experience. In fact, this kind of deep questioning – this Great Doubt - is implicit in your faith. Maybe sometimes it will even come before faith in some people. True doubt can give rise to faith, as well as being an expression of your faith. So it can engender your faith and express it as well. So discussing faith and doubt like this, we're not just having an interesting look into ancient Chinese Buddhism. We're talking about the actual dynamics of spiritual life.

Let's try and relate it to our experience. Maybe we don't have the extraordinarily intense and ascetic life of Chao Chu and his followers, but what about us? What about our faith and our doubt?

As I was starting to think about this, I remembered a time in my early teens – thirteen or fourteen, maybe fifteen - that terribly painful, confusing time, when it's all happening. You know, it's all kicking off at that time, isn't it? All those chemicals swirling around, all that kind of post-puberty stuff, and you don't know who or what you are. And I remember a time during this where I had my first stirrings of a real doubt. Not a doubt in the sense of a lack of commitment, but a questioning of life - a deep questioning. Not that deep, of course, because I was so confused. But something was going on.

I was brought up a Christian. Good old C of E, high church. So it was church every Sunday, sometimes twice. I was in the choir. I served at Holy Communion – I must have looked very sweet. [chuckles] Not. But I did have big questions. God, Christ,… I never kind of went along with them really. They just weren't apparent. I mean, this Creator of the Universe and this Saviour, they just weren't apparent to me. It's not that I had anything against them. But, they just didn't seem to be around – they weren't there. I didn't feel they were there. So, surely then, life is just material, physical, materialistic. That's all there is. There's nothing "spiritual." There's just stuff. There's nothing deeper, nothing higher, no purpose.

But I wasn't convinced by that either – that kind of materialistic outlook – because I did have some sense, maybe some romantic sense, of something deeper. I knew I didn't want to follow convention from an early age. I knew I didn't want a regular job. I knew I didn't want to get married and all that. But at that age, spiritual, religion, was identified with God the Creator. So I was in a real conflict between a materialistic worldview, if you like, and the religious worldview. And I can remember we had a very good religious knowledge teacher at the school I went to and he used to organize these class debates. You know, on things like the existence of God and things like that. I could argue for both with equal gusto. I could take both sides. One day I'd be definitely religious and another

I'd be totally anti-religion – there's just physical existence. It was a real issue amidst the maelstrom of post-puberty.

But the thing is, that questioning, that doubt, got me searching. It got me looking, it got me longing. I experienced openings, usually to do with listening to music – John Coltrane and people like that. And that got me into reading and exploring in those ways, a kind of faith and intuition was developing that eventually got me to Buddhism, to the Dharma, reading Lama Govinda's books.

And I was just amazed, because here was religion, here was spiritual life, without God. A rich, deep, thorough spiritual life - that you could live, that you could internalize without a God capping it all, putting the mockers on everything. And that was an immediate connection when I started to read about Buddhism. Eventually, of course, I devoted my life to Buddhism, because nothing else seemed to be worth doing. And, you know, I lived happily ever after and everything went smoothly. [Laughter] I sailed down the white path to Nirvana. I wish! And I'm sure my story has resonances with yours, you know, discovering Buddhism. "Yes! Certainty!" Ha! That's a laugh.

But, of course, this deep doubt doesn't go away. That deep questioning doesn't leave. It can't leave. The dialectic between faith and doubt is what spiritual practice is all about. In fact, it's important to generate the dialectic, the tension, between faith and doubt. In Zen tradition they say there are three elements that are needed: Great Faith, Great Determination (arising from the Great Faith), and Great Doubt. These interact, and they lead to Great Death, which leads to Great Awakening.

04 Hakuin and doubt; Yen Tu cut down; feeling let down; Master Bao and Hakuin

So let's look into this. And in particular I want to look at this in the life of the great 18th-century Japanese Zen master Hakuin. His name, by the way, means "whiteness." The earthy, the refined, the humorous, the severe, the wonderful, Hakuin.

So, Hakuin was born into a pious Buddhist family and at a very early age he had doubt – he had doubt about life itself. At a young age he was overwhelmed by impermanence and change. At the beach one day - seeing the clouds scuttle across the sky, seeing the waves coming in, feeling the wind blowing – he just fainted at all this change, all this restlessness, all this impermanence. Just swooned, it was too much. On one occasion he said, "Mother, is there nothing that doesn't change?" And Mother replied, "The Buddha's teaching. That always remains constant." So, he went to the Buddhist temple with his mother to listen to lectures on the Lotus Sutra, which were rather simplistic and pious. One preacher gave a vivid description of the fires of hell that you burn in if you harm creatures, and poor old Hakuin being a healthy little boy had harmed creatures. So he got very worried, he got terrified, and enormous doubt and uncertainty was generated in him. "What will happen to me?" He prayed to his family god, he prayed to Kwan Yin, Avalokitesvara. He wouldn't take a bath, because in his home the bath water was heated up by a fire and it just reminded him of these terrible hells. He wanted certainty.

So eventually at fifteen he left home, he became a monk, entered a monastery – which he found really dull, he found the lectures on the White Lotus Sutra really boring.

So, he left the monastery and he became a wandering monk, flowing with the rivers and the breezes, following the way, visiting monasteries, visiting teachers. And he found his way to a monastery. And here he heard a story that plunged him into even more doubt. So, out of doubt, out of the uncertainty of life, he's following the Buddhist path, he's found something in the Buddha's teaching. He's a wanderer. He goes to find the teachings. Buddhism is the way, if you like. But now he comes across a story that really plunged him into doubt. Not just doubt, but spiritual despair. He wanted some sort of refuge, some sort of permanence, some safe place – don't we all? And he heard at this monastery a story that deeply, deeply shocked him.

It was the story of the great Yen Tu. Yen Tu, again a great Chinese Ch'an master of the 9th century, a man of great attainment and strength - it's said he had a backbone of iron - a great teacher with many disciples. And at that time in China it was going through one of its upheavals, its periods of anarchy. Groups of bandits were running amok, smashing up monasteries and killing monks unless they paid tribute, paid a bribe – protection money. And they'd just smash places up, kill monks if they didn't get the money. It really was very rough.

And one day these brigands attacked Yen Tu's monastery. And all of Yen Tu's disciples just ran for it. That's an interesting story in itself. Wouldn't we? But the old teacher, Yen Tu, was not going to move. Some of these old Ch'an masters are likened to blind donkeys because they're so spiritually stubborn. So, Yen Tu wasn't going to move, this old blind donkey. He just sat in meditation in the shrine hall while the monastery was being destroyed around him. And eventually the rough warriors – verminous warriors – came in and they surrounded old Yen Tu, and they said, "C'mon priest! Give us the money! Show us where the goldis!" And Yen Tu didn't say a word – he wasn't going to parlay with them. He just sat, looking straight ahead. And so eventually the blows started to rain down. And then the swords started to slash. Yen Tu was just being cut down where he sat. Until eventually he just gave a great cry, "KA!" And then died. And the shout was heard for miles around.

Now, for Hakuin, this was appalling. There was no romance in this story – it sounds very romantic, but it wasn't for Hakuin – this is just an old monk cut down in a smashed temple, his screams being heard for miles around. And Hakuin thought, "Well, if that happens to somebody like Yen Tu, what about me? I'm nowhere near that kind of quality and he just gets… killed!" There's nothing more worthless than the life of a Buddhist monk. So, Hakuin just decided to pack it in. And he went off to study calligraphy and poetry with Master Bao.

And of course, this can happen to us, this sort of thing. There are parallels for us, in our own way. We discover Buddhism, we take up the path, there's a lot of hope, a lot of expectation, everything's gonna be okay, we're going to do good with ourselves in the world. But, sooner or later, we discover some things that, you know, make us feel kind

of let down. Maybe we discover things about the Buddha that we don't like - maybe the way he left his family. And some of his teachings are a bit hard line, hardcore. Or we hear things or see things in our spiritual friends – people we put a lot of faith in – and we feel let down. Whatever. We begin to think that Buddhism doesn't really offer anything. It won't protect us, won't make things all right, so let's go and take up playing the cello or being a novelist or whatever it may be.

Anyway, Hakuin took up calligraphy, and he was with the very demanding Master Bao, very tough. He's such a great teacher that everybody left. [Laughter] Everybody left except Hakuin. People say a great teacher draws everybody out and everything. I think the sign of a **really** great teacher would be that everybody leaves. Everybody goes. [Laughter] Because he doesn't care whether you like him or not. All he's concerned about is that you really train and really learn. But Hakuin was tough and he stayed with Master Bao and looked after him when he was sick.

But then Hakuin had another crisis. He realized, "Well, I'll never be as great as Li Po and Tu Fu. I'll never be a great poet. I'll never be a great calligrapher." Actually, he is regarded as a great calligrapher now, but he thought, "Well, I'll never be any good at that. I'll never be a master." So what to do is another big crisis, "What am I going to do with my life?"

So, he closed his eyes and kind of went over the books that Master Bao had in his library and just pulled out a book at random. Flicked it open, and it was a story of an old Chinese Zen master, and about this Zen master's training. And how when he was meditating long into the night he started to doze off and how he grabbed hold of the gimlet and just jabbed his thigh with it to wake himself up. And Hakuin thought, "Yes! [Laughter] That's real determination. Don't give up!"

05 'Mu' - Wu Men and the Gateless Gate; the 'No' beyond 'yes' and 'no'

Awakening doesn't come easily. So he plunged back into his practice, particularly into meditation. And in particular he took up the story of Chou Chu's "No." He took up "Mu." And I've already said that by Hakuin's time – it happened of course long before in China – there was this long tradition of meditating on, contemplating, the stories and sayings of the old masters. The sayings, the exchanges, the stories were brought together in various collections. These stories were commented on by other Zen masters and the commentaries are often as bewildering as the exchange itself. Designed to help you probe into – dig into – the question, the problem. To generate that deep, profound questioning. So, he took up the *koan* – that's the Japanese for *kung'an* – the legal precedent. He took up the exemplary exchange and started to dig into it in order to awaken and to see things as they are.

By Hakuin's time, actually what you meditated on was known as the *wato* - the, as it were, punchline of the story. You know the story, you know the background, you're

imbued with that, but you take up the one phrase or the one word that sums up the whole thing. And in this case it's "Mu. No." And one of the great *koan* collections is called the *Gateless Gate*, collected by and commented on by somebody called Wu Men, whose name means "gateless." And the first *koan* of that collection is Chao Chu's "No." So, I'm going to read you what Wu Men says about this, how you should meditate on Chao Chu's "No."

To practice meditation you must pass through the barrier of the masters. To attain this subtle realization you must cast off all dualistic thinking. What is this barrier? It is the single word, "No." This is the front gate to Zen. If you go through it you see Chao Chu. You tangle eyebrows with Zen masters. You see with their eyes, hear with their ears. Isn't that a delightful prospect? Wouldn't you like to pass through this barrier?

And then he tells you how you pass through this barrier:

Arouse your entire body, with its 360 bones and joints, and 84,000 pores of the skin. Summon up a spirit of Great Doubt (the doubt I've been talking about) *and concentrate on this "No." Carry it continuously day and night. Do not form a nihilistic conception of vacancy. Don't think of "No" as "Yes" or "No" or "Has" or "Has not." It must become like a red-hot iron ball you have swallowed which you vomit and vomit but cannot bring forth. Cast aside all your old misconceptions, slowly, naturally, purely. The inner and outer become of a single piece. Then suddenly you arise to startle the heavens and shake the earth. How do you concentrate on "No" with every bit of your strength? If you do not falter you will light a lamp to benefit the world.*

And then he gives a verse:

The dog, the Buddha-Nature -
Chao Chu's pronouncement, perfect and final;
A moment of "yes" and "no"
Lost are body and mind.

This is extraordinary - Chao Chu's "No." To "Does a dog have Buddha-Nature?" is no ordinary "No." But says "No" not only to "Yes" but to "No" as well. It's a "No" that says "No" not only to "Yes" but to "No" as well. It's the "No" beyond "Yes" and "No." A moment of "Yes" and "No." This really is the Great Doubt – the deep doubt. We go along thinking, "Everything is as it is. People are the way they are – solid and substantial. I'm here. You're there." But look into it. It's not like that. People change, things change, things pass on, they're insubstantial. You could think in the end, "They are not the vacancy, the nihilism." But that's just a notion, that's just an idea. You are here, right before me, and I'm here too. But if I look for you and you look for me, we won't finally find one another. Yet, we stand facing one another.

So, the Great Doubt embodied in Chao Chu's "No" is the doubt that sweeps away any and every idea, any and every conception, any and every notion we have about life – even the idea of nothing. This is what you have to do eventually in Buddhist practice. At first

you steadily build up, out of faith and confidence, out of concentration and meditation. You build up your precepts, your spiritual friendships, you study, you build as it were, yourself, up. But then you need to examine. You need to look into yourself, and everything else. You need to see what's actually there. What's going on inside and outside.

This is actually reflected in our System of Practice in the Order. The first two stages of practice are to do with integration and developing creative emotion – mindfulness of breathing, *metta bhavana* – then you do the practices which are concerned with contemplating *sunyata* and insubstantiality. There those practices are concerned to bring about the Great Death. Beyond that, other practices are to do with the Great Spiritual Rebirth.

Anyway, Hakuin really took it up, out of great faith and great determination. He dug into "Mu." Endlessly, silently repeating it. Feeling it deep inside, all the time. Whether he was sitting meditating, whether he was walking, whether he was sitting down, whether he was lying down – he just developed the Great Doubt. "No, no, no." The "No" that is not "No." The "No" that is not the opposite of "Yes." The "No" that is "No" to "No." The Great Question.

06 Hakuin's autobiographical account of the Great Doubt; entering the ice field and awakening

And he describes what opened up for him in one of his autobiographical writings – a remarkable passage:

In the spring of my 24th year, I was staying at Eigan-ji Monastery, pursuing my strenuous studies. Night and day I did not sleep. I forgot both to eat and rest. Suddenly the Great Doubt manifested itself before me. It was though I was frozen solid, in the midst of an ice sheet expanding tens of thousands of miles. A purity filled my heart and I could neither go forward nor retreat. To all intents and purposes, I was out of my mind and the "Mu," the "No" alone remained sounding. At times, I felt as though I was floating in air. This state lasted for several days. Then one night, at midnight, I heard the temple bell sounding in the distance and I was suddenly transformed. It was as if the sheet of ice had been smashed, or a jade tower had fallen with a crash. Body and mind dropped away. I understood Yen Tu, how he could never be touched. I cried out 'Yen Tu is right here, alive and well!'

And the monks in the monastery thought that someone was being beaten up and given the same fate as Yen Tu. They rushed into the shrine room only to see Hakuin beaming with joy. Not only does he resolve "Mu," he resolves Yen Tu's fate as well.

So, here you get some insight, some feeling into what the Great Doubt really is. It's the most profound questioning. The deepest possible doubt. You're looking into your deeply embedded categories, questioning them deeply and that is setting up a tension. You're

looking into existence and non-existence, form and emptiness, being and non-being. You enter the ice field. And then there is a shattering, a breaking, a dissolving. There's a Great Death and then a joyous awakening.

07 Sho Ji and Hakuin - zen sickness

For Hakuin, it still hadn't finished. In a way he had had a Great Death, and in a way he hadn't. You don't have one final Great Death, because, he started to get very proud and he started to fancy himself. He started to think, "I am the greatest Zen master of all time." Fortunately, he met a wild teacher named Shoji. Very wild, who he was attracted to and thought he would impress. And Shoji says, "We know what you've learned, but what do you know?" And Shoji just thrust him back into practice, very intensive practice. Hakuin would come with his realization and Shoji would say, "You're just a devil."

There were breakthroughs and ecstasies. There's the story of how when he was begging he was so absorbed in his *koan* practice, so absorbed in the Great Doubt, that he didn't hear the woman saying, "Look, we don't give food to you lazy monks!" But Hakuin wouldn't move, because he was so absorbed in his practice. So, she just came out and gave him a damn good thrashing with her broom, and he fell down in a puddle and then jumped up with ecstasy. He'd had a realisation as he was down in this puddle - people thought he was mad, and he was in a way.

He had another crisis. It doesn't get any easier, the spiritual life. [Laughter] You think it's tough now, it' just going to get worse, but you're just going to be big enough to handle it. He had Zen sickness. Terrible fevers and he couldn't sleep. It was a kind of nervous disorder. He had to track back. He had to do calming meditation. He took up sort of Taoist meditation practices, which have been kind of integrated in Buddhism. Much more calming practice. In particular he developed this idea of sitting down in the tanden, sitting down in the area just below the navel, the solar plexus area, down there. And you do all your practice down there. He learnt from that, and he told all his disciples, "You do all your Great Doubting down there, down below the navel. The Pure Land is down there."

I think this is very significant. He had these great visions, these great breakthroughs, these great insights, but then the visions have to sort of descend and permeate through the whole being. I think you can get a sense from Hakuin's life - you have breakthroughs, but then this presents more challenges. You're never "saved" in that sense. It really is *gate gate paragate*. Going beyond all the time.

Now all this can seem, I know, (and I'm the same as you in relation to all this) very distant and very steep. A sheer cliff face. How can we relate to this? It seems so far out. Is there anything to learn here at all? I mean, I think it's just great stuff, and I get turned on by it – it makes me want to go and meditate, go and practice. But there are things.

For Hakuin, "Mu," "No," is a real problem. "Everything has Buddha-Nature?" "No." He had great faith, great determination, he wanted to awaken, so the "No," the problem was real. For us, it probably isn't a real problem. It might be for some of you, but I must say, I've rarely in my life come across people for whom Buddhist teachings pose a real problem, a deep questioning. I very rarely meet people like that. Very rarely do you come across people like Sangharakshita in his young days, when he was having a conversation about *sunyata* with a Tibetan monk, and the monk says, "What is the cause of *sunyata*? What is the cause of emptiness?" He said that became a real issue for him to resolve – to go away and question. It's very rare that I come across people in study groups that come to me with a real Dharma question. It's not just an idea, but it's a burning emotional issue.

08 Koans realized in life - a deeper level of practice; work, relationships, sex ('the red thread of passion'), etc; using problems in practice

But there are other types of *koans*, deep burning questions. Dogen speaks of two kinds of *koans*. There's the *koan* of ancient paradigm, like Chao Chu's "No," and there's also the *koan* realized in life. And, as usual, his discussions of the *koans* realized in life are very profound. But I'm quite taken with this phrase – the *koan* realized in life, and I'd like to suggest that there are life *koans*, *koans* in life. Deep questions, problems, paradoxes - generated by our faith, generated by our practice and commitment to follow the path – that arise for us. Deep dilemmas that make us question deeply, that set up great polarities in our lives, which will only resolve if we shift to a deeper level of spiritual practice.

I'm just going to throw out a few of these, just a few random *koans* for you to think about. I'm sure there are many more you can think about in your own experience.

<u>The *koan* of work</u>

We live a spiritual life and are drawn to a spiritual life. We want intensity in that spiritual life and we want to do more of it, but our work takes us away from it. It takes us away from spiritual friendships. It makes us tired. But we like the money and we need the money to live and to eat. So, what to do? And we kind of like our work - it gives us a freedom. But, what to do? We want to go deeper into our spiritual life, but our work seems to take us away from it. So, what to do about that? What's the answer to that question?

<u>The *koan* of relationships</u>

We're deeply committed to spiritual practice. We want to put more into it. But our girlfriend or boyfriend, or wife, or family are just not interested. They're even rather hostile about it. We love them, and we care for them, but we don't want to give up the spiritual life, which they'd kind of like us to do. We don't want to give up those we love. We don't want to give up spiritual life. So, what to do?

<u>The *koan* of sex</u>

We're deeply committed to spiritual life. We're deeply committed to spiritual life. We also like sex, a lot. Trouble is we often end up in difficult, problematic relationships. And even if the relationship is good, it takes up so much time. We like sex, there's a lot of intimacy in that, but somehow we feel it compromises our spiritual intensity but we don't want to give up the sex. So, what to do about the "red thread of passion," as some of the Japanese masters call it? In fact, Ikkyu, in his life, he actually contemplates sex koans. There are sex koans in the Zen tradition. You know, it was an issue. What to do about the red thread of passion? There's no easy answer… often, frequently.

The *koan* of sangha

You're deeply into spiritual life and you want to go even further in your spiritual life. You're also with a good group of spiritual friends – a study group at a center, a Going for Refuge group, or you're in a really good community - but there's one person who's a complete pain. They're awkward (or *you* think so), you get into bad states around them, you get upset by them, you feel guilty or shameful about your bad states. Anyway, it's their fault! What to do? Are you going to ask them to go? Well, how will that be for him? Are you going to go? "No, I can't go, I like it here!" And you like the others. So, what are you to do? You can't leave, they can't leave. What's the answer?

There can be the *koan* of spiritual life versus artistic life, that can be a real problem for some people.

There's the *koan* of calm versus activity. You want more time for meditation, you also want more time for more activity.

There's the *koan* of, is spiritual life a kind of natural process of waking up, it's all just there, you don't apparently do anything? Or is spiritual life about developing something, generating something?

There's the *koan* of the active versus the receptive…

And so on and so forth. They go on and on. You'll find them, they're there. Our spiritual community, our Order, is filled with them. People discuss them endlessly. It would be better if they just internalized them and worked on them in themselves.

Most of the time we shy away from these doubts, these deep questions. We don't go right into them. We want the answer. We want Sangharakshita or our spiritual friends to tell us what to do, tell us the answer. Much better to go right into them ourselves. Bring them up, and sit with them. Go into them, get underneath them. Because probably, underneath these issues are much deeper existential issues to do with the very nature of existence. To do with the very nature of birth and death, and life and death. So, dig into your *koans*.

Once someone went to great master Yun Men and said, "I've been practicing for a long time but I can't seem to find an entry, a way into, a real direct experience of the Dharma." Basically he's saying he didn't have any insight. "How do I get in?" And Yun Men replied, "Your present concern is your way in." If you have a problem, a concern, a question, use it in your practice. Use it to fuel your practice. Get interested in that question.

For example, *metta bhavana*, fourth stage, there's somebody you dislike. Maybe you even hate them. Well, look forward to that stage. Don't kind of shy off it, don't back off. Don't go in to hate them or anything like that, into a hate session. But look forward, get interested in turning that around, turning that over, looking into what's going on. Get interested . It's a problem! Amazing! Let's crack that! Maybe I'll break through into a new reality.

09 Practising in the Alaya; Ta Hui and Yuan Wu - in the whirlpool

At the beginning of this talk, I said that I wanted to show how you practice in the depths of the mind. How to bring about *paravriti*, the revolution in the basis. Hakuin's shattering of the ice field is a description of that revolution in the basis, that dissolving of a dualistic consciousness. Of course, there were further stages to go for him. But, I think it's clear that the revolution in the basis comes about through intensive and constant spiritual practice. But, it's not just a question of intensive and constant. What we in fact need to do is to take our practice – our faith, our commitment, our determination, our Great Doubt - right into the *alaya* itself, into the deepest part of our being. We need to start practising in the *alaya*.

At first, this simply means constant repeated practice. In the koan tradition of Zen, you just keep up the questioning, in all aspects of the day, whatever you're doing. Whether you're working, whether you're meditating, whatever, you just keep it going. But I think we could also say, it's about keeping up constant mindfulness, constant awareness, or constant metta through all times of the day. Or constant recitation of mantra throughout the day. Or constant reflection on impermanence throughout the day. Whatever. You keep it going, and the aim is to keep is going in dream, in deep sleep, even in death. A stream of meditation, a stream contemplation, going on all the time. This is dwelling in the depths, dwelling in the *alaya*. In the Zen tradition, the teacher's job is to keep you there, keep you in it, and that's not easy because we want to be superficial, we want to be on the surface.

There's a beautiful story here of Ta Hui, great 11th century Chinese master and the disciple of the great Yuan Wu himself (the compiler of the Blue Cliff Record). And Ta Hui had been practicing under Yuan Wu for some time in his monastery and Ta Hui had done a lot of this questioning meditation, *koan* meditation. And he'd had some great experiences. In fact, he thought he was enlightened, that he'd awakened. And he told Yuan Wu clearly (the old boy, he was getting on now, Yuan Wu) "Well, I'm enlightened now. Will you acknowledge my enlightenment?" And Yuan Wu said, "No, no. You're

not enlightened." And Ta Hui thought, "The old fool. Well he's not enlightened because he doesn't recognize my supreme enlightenment." So, Ta Hui decided he was just going to leave Yuan Wu and go off and become a teacher himself. But Yuan Wu warned him. He said, "If you go, you'll get sick and it won't work out well." And Ta Hui thought, "The poor old fool, he's really lost it. He's getting very stupid. He must be a bit senile, a bit attached to me."

So, he just left - travelled about, proclaiming his enlightenment, and gathering quite a following of disciples. Some people really love it if you say you're enlightened – it makes them feel so secure. It's much easier when you've got an enlightened master. You're very safe. And one day, of course, Ta Hui fell seriously ill and fell into a coma, a deep unconscious state. Fell into the *alaya*. And when he came to he realized that while he was unconscious he'd lost his *koan* – he lost his awareness. His awareness wasn't continuous, he'd lost it. He suddenly realized, "Gosh, I'm not what I thought I was."

And he managed to get well after worshiping the Buddhas, and he returned to Yuan Wu with real humility. And he just got on with meditating and practicing and just doing the daily chores around the monastery. Just like everybody else. Meditating and working in the kitchen, in the gardens, in the fields. And Yuan Wu, the old boy, kept an eye on him.

And he said one day to Ta Hui, "Let's go for a walk." So, there's the old boy and the young disciple and they go for a walk, and they come to a great waterfall. At the bottom of the waterfall there's a deep whirlpool. And they're looking at it, and admiring it. And then suddenly, with incredible strength, Yuan Wu just grabbed Ta Hui and just thrust him into the whirlpool, just held him in there until he nearly drowned. Then pulled him out and pushed him down again with superhuman strength – this sort of demented old man, just dunking his disciple repeatedly. At some point Yuan Wu asked Ta Hui a koan question – something strange. And Ta Hui just answered clearly. He said, "It was as if the two of us were sitting in a room together. Everything was still and calm and clear, and I was utterly awake," even though there was this old man just dunking him up and down, even unto the edge of death. Ta Hui really had awakened. He'd passed through the Gateless Gate. He was always awake.

This is what the master does. He keeps you in the depths. He inspires you to continuous deep practice and just pushes you into the *alaya* all the time. So, with the whirlpool, I'm sure it happened, but it's also a metaphor. The master just keeps you dunked all the time. So that's where we should aim our practice. Continuous deep practice – in meditation, in daily life, in sleep, in dream, in illness. You really know your practice is something if you keep going during illness. In death, in emergency, your practice is just one stream of practice. Then there can be revolution in the basis – the turning around in the deepest seat of consciousness. When we just break the prison of all our ideas and notions, of space, time, self, and other. They just shatter.

10 Dogen's verse

The whole universe
shatters into a hundred pieces.
In the great death
there is no heaven, no earth.

Once body and mind have turned over
there is only this to say:
Past mind cannot be grasped,
present mind cannot be grasped,
future mind cannot be grasped.

On Saturday, we'll see how a man who has turned over walks in the world.