

Buddha's Nature

With the kind authorization of **Genjo Osho**



The following Dharma talk was given on the first day of this year's Autumn Dai-sesshin (1999). It is Genjo Osho's commentary on Case 1 of the Mumonkan (Gateless Gate) compiled by Zen Master Mumon in 1228. Genjo Osho makes it a habit to begin each Daisesshin with an examination of this case. Zen Master Joshu (778-897) is one of the most renowned Zen Masters of all time.

A monk once asked Master Joshu, "Has a dog the Buddha Nature or not?" Joshu said, "Mu!"

In studying Zen, one must pass the barriers set up by ancient Zen Masters. For the realization of incomparable satori, one has to cast away one's discriminating mind. Those who have not passed the barrier and have not cast away the discriminating mind are all phantoms haunting trees and plants.

Now, tell me, what is the barrier of the Zen masters? Just this "Mu" — it is the barrier of Zen. It is thus called, "the gateless barrier of Zen." Those who have passed the barrier will not only see Joshu clearly, but will go hand in hand with all the Masters of the past, see them face to face. You will see with the same eye that they see with and hear with the same ear. Wouldn't it be wonderful? Don't you want to pass the barrier? Then concentrate yourself into this "Mu," with your 360 bones and 84,000 pores, making your whole body one great inquiry. Day and night work intently at it. Do not attempt nihilistic (absolute) or dualistic (relative) interpretations. It is like having swallowed a red hot iron ball. You try to vomit it but cannot.

Cast away your illusory discriminating knowledge and consciousness accumulated up to now, and keep on working harder. After a while, when your efforts come to fruition, all the oppositions (such as in and out, life and death, form and non-form) will naturally be identified. You will then be like a person without the capacity to speak or hear who has had a wonderful dream: the dreamer will know it personally within, but will be unable to share it with others who have not dreamed it for themselves. Suddenly, as you break through the gateless barrier, you will astonish heaven and shake the earth.

It is as if you have snatched the great sword of General Kan. You kill the Buddha if you meet him; you kill the ancient Masters if you meet them. On the brink of life and death you are utterly free, and in the six realms and the four modes of life you live, with great joy, a genuine life in complete freedom. Now, how should one strive? With might and main work at this "Mu," and be "Mu." If you do not stop or waver in your striving, then behold, when the Dharma candle is lighted, darkness is at once vanquished.

The dog! The Buddha Nature!
The Truth is manifested in full.
A moment of yes-and-no:
Lost are your body and soul.

Why do we continue to reexamine Joshu's "Mu" again and again? If we find ourselves doing Zen practice, we must have come to a certain place in our natural unfolding as a human being, where we understand that it is possible to encourage or stimulate our own development or flowering. We are all in the process of flowering from before we are born; however, we are a very odd kind of blossom that can, at some point, realize that we are a bud in bloom. When this realization occurs, we then feel motivated to till our own soil, and we seek out some spiritual or creative endeavor to water, fertilize and nurture our own "soul-fullness." And just what is this "soul-fullness," this "inner essence" or "breath of being?" Well, one demonstration or vocalization of this "inner essence" that informs, sustains and animates all things in every dimension is "Muuuuuu"

I don't know why "Mu" or "Ommmmm..." have become recognized as direct manifestations of something unspeakable and unnamable. For some reason, these sounds have an uncanny ability to foster a recognition of a very broad and vast foundational reality. When we chant the Heart Sutra over and over throughout our week together in both the traditional and English forms, we find that "Mu" is translated into English as simply "no." "No eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind...no attainment." In fact, there is not a literal translation for "Mu" into English, and even when we make a more complete interpretation, any interpretation remains so superficial compared to a direct vocalization of "Muuuuuu..." Just listening to "Muuu..." gives a much more complete impression than any definition can offer. Yet, allow me to try and explain. "Mu" is roughly translated as "no," "not," "nothing" or "emptiness." These terms have a negative connotation, and one reason for this is that in the East there has been a more consistent recognition of the necessity to not name something that must remain nameless, because to name "IT" begins limiting that which is limitless. No name or positive affirmation can ever get close; yet, "IT" can be thought of as the underlining flow, vibration or harmonic of the universe in all of its dimensions. Everywhere, everything is Mu." Everywhere, everything is nothing but a manifestation of the fundamental fabric that preceded the Big Bang and is unchanged by a Big Crunch.

So, when the Heart Sutra says there is "No eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind..." you may say, well wait a minute, here is my nose, my eye, my tongue speaking through this body, and this is so; yet, the Heart Sutra is referring to the fact that in reality no one thing is really separate from anything else. From an absolute perspective, there is no such thing as a separate discrete identity. Each one of us is a composite of many dimensions of being that are freely flowing and exchanging with one another. There are no discrete boundaries between one another, or even between being and non-being. We label and discriminate for our convenience, but our refined discriminations do not enforce upon reality discrete identities. The universe is one big soup where the ingredients can never be isolated because there were never discrete ingre-

dients in the first place. The many aspects of the universe can be thought of as different temporary arrangements of one multidimensional stuff.

On the back wall of our zendo is the calligraphy of Yamanouchi Sensei, and it has four characters: White, Cloud, No (Mu), Heart/Mind (Shin). What we call our personal identity is like that of a cloud in the sky. Yes, we can say that the cloud has a separate existence, but in reality it is just water vapor or sky coalesced into a very temporary shape. Cloud is not separate from sky, it is just a manifestation of the sky that we call cloud, just as we call ourselves John, Genko, Carolyn, or Genjo. These many variations are all part of one indivisible "sky." Each "cloud" has no discrete borders, except those that we artificially impose on them through our naming. These artificial boundaries are undeniably useful, but delusional if we mistake them as fixed divisions between self and other. Now, it is true that each "cloud" is a uniquely different manifestation of sky. No cloud has ever been or will ever be exactly like another. "You" are uniquely different from "me," and we have never appeared exactly as we are right now, nor before, nor will we ever be the same again. So, there is truth concerning the uniqueness of everything. There has never been this tree, this stone, this raindrop, this you or me, this cloud, this day, ever before, nor will there ever be again. This truth makes us appreciate just how fleeting and precious this moment is. Every cloud is unique, but never has any cloud been separate from "Blue Sky Essence."

Now that we have unfolded as a human being sufficiently enough to become aware of the process, and desire to offer some assistance to ourselves, what kind of assistance can we offer? We train at being so present to the "Here and Now" that we see through the artificial distinctions between this and that, without losing, in fact gaining, appreciation for everything. So, our effort is dedicated to punching through the delusions that separate us. We exhaust or combust them here on our zafus (meditation cushions), during kinhin (walking meditation), and chanting the sutras. Through our training we strip down the ideas and concepts that separate us. So often we cling to what we like and push away what we dislike; yet, if Mu is everything, then everything we dislike is also Mu. Then part of our training is to realize that everything we dislike also has its place, just as every cloud, no matter how dark or violent, has its place in the sky. If we can not make this leap, then we will be forever stuck with only part of the picture. Without the full picture, our freedom to see things clearly and do what needs doing will remain very limited.

We say that we don't like pain, but here in sesshin (Zen retreat) we learn how to appreciate pain. We don't like fatigue, but here we come to meet and learn how not to be possessed by fatigue. Most of us begin sesshin with a concrete sense of our own personal identity, but here we come to see through artificial distinctions, to realize that from any point in the universe we can get to any other. So, you are not separate from me, though we are uniquely different. We come to sesshin to meet boredom, clean toilets, get our hands dirty, and face our own anger, sadness, joy and sorrow, without rejecting anything, in fact accepting that everything has its place. Here we realize how to appreciate every aspect of existence, every pain, every breath, every puff of breeze, every drop of rain, every ray of sunshine, every sparkle of morning star, every blossom, every piece of dog shit. This is our work, just to appreciate everything, and learn how not to be pushed around by our prejudices, our inhibitions, our dislikes, our preconceptions, our beliefs, our ideas, our hopes.

We are not here to learn how to get rid of any of these aspects, because they too must be Mu. It is important to know how to have our pain, or our opinions, or our dislikes, without them fundamentally fouling our full perception of the enormity and wonder of this moment of eternity.

This is the barrier of Zen, to learn how to appreciate THIS... Our task is to become so raw, so vulnerable, so exposed that there becomes no question as to our ability to deeply appreciate the vast wonderment of every aspect and every corner of every dimension of the universe. Wouldn't you like to pass this gateless barrier? What stands in our way? Nothing! What do we have to attain? Nothing! Just learn to fully appreciate this breath, this body, this pain, this ray of sun. Just this! Know that for everything we dislike about ourselves, or another, that each and every one of us is nothing less, nothing more, than a pure, completely untarnished manifestation of "Muuuuu..."

Does a dog have a Buddha Nature or not? Even to say Buddha Nature is to get lost in delusion; hence, Zen Master Joshu just reveals THIS directly by saying "Muuuuu..." The term "Buddha Nature" is nothing but a name. Does a dog have a Buddha Nature? No answer, just "Muuuuuuuuu..." Or perhaps Joshu made use of the opportunity to clear his 360 bones and 84,000 pores and shouted "MUUUUUUUU!" Or maybe, Joshu responded with a simple direct short "Mu." Why the large shouts? Shouts help with the process of clearing up and pushing through our own discriminations, hesitations, inhibitions and defensiveness, leading us to a fully realized unhindered "Mu" that reveals and celebrates this sunshine, this gentle breeze, this falling leaf. We must get past our own discriminations, hopes and desires and exhaust and combust our doubts, until we realize that our doubts and desires are also just "Muuu...", "Muuu..."

Every koan is like this. In our temple, Genki Roshi made it a habit to start all new students with the koan, "What is the essence of the temple bell?" This first koan could also be phrased: "Bring me the Mu activity of the temple bell." When this koan is fully penetrated we realize that the temple bell is a close relation, as close, no closer than our own brother or sister. The bell's essence is as close as our own "soul-fullness." The depth of the bell's nature is also the depth of our own nature. Touch, experience, the source upon which everything is based, and each of us becomes no longer stuck in our gender, age, or species. It is our own conceptualizations and delusions that hold us back from having a heart/mind connection with anything and everything. With practice we come to see with the eyes of Buddha, hear with the ears of Buddha, and whatever clothes we wear are the clothes of Buddha, and whatever food we eat is the food of Buddha. Whenever, we take a crap, that's Buddha crap.

Nothing is preventing us from passing through the gateless gate. Simply realize fully for yourself that you are already nothing more and nothing less than "Muuu..." "Concentrate yourself into this "Mu," with your 360 bones and 84,000 pores, making your whole body one great inquiry," one great gateless gate. "Practice day and night." Nurture yourself, nurture

this process of unfolding day and night. Do not get stuck in ideas of Buddha Nature. Do not get stuck in definitions of "Mu." Become realized "Mu" energy and activity.

"Cast away your illusory discriminating knowledge and consciousness accumulated up to now, and keep on working harder," and harder, and harder! Then in the readiness of time this effort will come to fruition. Without question we will all continue to ripen. Even if we are not making any conscious effort to help ourselves along we are likely to continue to ripen slowly anyway.

After a while, we become "like a person without the capacity to speak or hear who has had a wonderful dream," a dream of reality just as it really is, with the sudden ability to appreciate everything. With such an ability we are astonished at every turn, and we too become astonishing, because, at that time, it is revealed to us how we are not separate from the wondrous manifestations of heaven and earth. Then it is as though we "have snatched the great sword of General Kan." "Nothing clings to us and we hold to nothing." In this condition there can be no Buddha; therefore, there is no need to kill him, he has already been extinguished. When we see the true nature of things, we fully realize that nothing is separate from THIS glorious manifestation of "Mu" activity. Nothing is separate from anything else, so what Buddha can there be? What is not Buddha? No Buddhas can exist, once the gateless barrier of Zen is penetrated and we find ourselves truly astonished by every aspect of heaven and earth, which must include our own reflection. Where can we look and not find Buddha; henceforth, Buddha or Buddha Nature become superfluous. Just this sunshine. Just this rain. Just this breath.

Then how should we strive? With might and main work at this "Mu." Whether we have come to this place of total appreciation or not, be "Mu." No matter how clear our perception may become, we repeatedly fall back into old familiar patterns. And we must shed our attachment to our self-identity again and again, like some animals repeatedly shed their skins. In this way, we liberate our upside-down views until we can sustain the truth that there is but one heart/mind with many faces. "The Dharma candle is lighted," and every bit of darkness is vanquished through the realization that even the darkness is IT!

"The dog! The Buddha Nature!" The sunshine! The rain! "The Truth is manifested in full." A moment of this is it, this is not it, this is Buddha, this is not Buddha, this is life, this is death; lost, lost, "lost are your body and soul."