
EVERYONE HAS A LIGHT

THE *BLUE CLIFF RECORD* is a collection of old Zen teaching stories from China, compiled in the twelfth century. When you study a teaching such as the *Blue Cliff Record*, what is the point you have to learn? Is it to get knowledge? Yes, it is, but also it is not, because the original nature of your life is not something you can fully understand by ideas.

If you try to fill your life just from the top, by gaining knowledge, then your head is very big. But the knowledge you gain is hard to carry because it's pretty heavy. It makes your head spin, and it's easy to lose your balance. Knowledge of Buddhism is always bothering you because the container is bottomless, so you can never get enough. Finally everything turns into suffering, and there is nothing to encourage you.

Does that mean you should stop thinking and studying? No way! You are a human being; you have to think. Thinking is pretty good for us. But don't be bogged down with thinking. Don't make your head ache. If your head begins to ache, stop thinking and take

care of yourself. Sooner or later you will have to think again. At that time, please think with kindness, with friendliness.

In Zen, we study and try to understand Buddha's teaching intellectually; we also practice and try to understand in a deeper way. In this way, instead of thinking and creating delusions, you can use thinking to calm down and touch something deep in your life. When you touch it, your life is filled from the bottom up, and you become mature.

The Blue Cliff Record, Case 86

The title of case 86 in the *Blue Cliff Record* is "Yun Men's Kitchen Pantry and Main Gate." This case is about your great, sublime capacity called light. Dogen was very interested in this case and mentioned it in *Shobogenzo Komyo* (Light). Here is the main story, translated by Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary:

Yun Men imparted some words saying, "Everyone has a light; when you look at it, you don't see it and it's dark and dim. What is everybody's light?" He himself answered on their behalf, "The kitchen pantry and the main gate." He also said, "A good thing isn't as good as nothing."

Wen Yen of Yun Men was an important teacher who died in 949 in southern China. In this story, Yun Men asks the monks, "What is everybody's light?" And then he answers his own question. According to his answer, light is the kitchen pantry and the main gate of the temple. But it could be your nose, your body, your house, your job, or your everyday routine because light manifests in every aspect of your life.

That is wonderful, but on the other hand Yun Men also says,

"A good thing isn't as good as nothing." He says so because if you think that every aspect of your life is already manifesting light, you can easily get stuck in everyday life. Then you ask: if my everyday life is already great light, why do I have to practice zazen? The moment you ask, you are already stuck. Even when something is good, if you get stuck in your idea of good, you are choked by good. Finally you don't know what good is. Then good turns into some human problem.

For instance, if you work hard and create a beautiful life, you may attach to your life. You believe you are wonderful: no one else could do what I did! Then you become critical toward others. We are always measuring, comparing, and evaluating ourselves and others like this. But if you are thinking in that way, you are already stuck in a concept of your great capacity, and you cannot move an inch.

It's the same with spiritual practice. If you see something wonderful through your practice, you may attach to what you have seen because it was a valuable experience for you. But when you are caught by the idea of what you experienced, it becomes a problem for you. That's why Yun Men says, "A good thing isn't as good as nothing."

Light is the original nature of your life. Everyone has that light. It is the core of your personality that Buddhism is always talking about. But it's very difficult to know what it is because light is nothing but energy, motion, or dynamic functioning; your conscious mind can never pick up anything in particular. If you try to conceptualize it, your original nature is dark and dim for you because you can't see it in that way.

Still, even though it cannot be conceptualized, it can be displayed because light is always functioning in your life. You can give play to it in every aspect of your life. So if you see something wonderful, don't get stuck! Accept it, experience it, and then keep your

mouth shut. Your experience will never disappear. It stays with your life and penetrates your life. It's not necessary to attach to it. Let it go!

Light and Dark: The Commentary of Blue Cliff Record, Case 86

The commentary section of "Yun Men's Kitchen Pantry and Main Gate" is very interesting. Let's start with the third paragraph in the Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary translation and study the commentary line by line. It says:

As soon as they hear you mention "light," people these days put a glare in their eyes and say, "Where is the kitchen pantry? Where is the main gate?" But this has nothing to do with it. Thus it is said, "Perceive the meaning on the hook; don't abide by the zero point of the scale." This matter is not in the eye or in the environment. To begin to understand you must cut off knowing and seeing, forget gain and loss, and become purified, naked, and perfectly at ease; each and every one must investigate on his own.

Buddhism always tries to explain the dynamic structure that interconnects your life with all beings from moment to moment. We do this so you will know that by wholeheartedly using your body, your consciousness, your personality, and your education, you can return to the origin of the self and see the total picture of your life. Zen practice is to just constantly return to zero. But when I tell you that by practicing with wholeheartedness you can become zero, you are immediately hooked by the idea of zero. Then you want to know: What is zero? If I become zero, who am I?

If you are measuring and evaluating your life, there is always

some word that can become a hook. Your consciousness, your body, and your understanding can also become hooks. Instead of enjoying the great capacity you already have, you are looking for something outside yourself. So to understand your life as a whole, train yourself to cut off your usual way of knowing and seeing, and just be the functioning of life right now, right here. This is a hard practice, but if you do this, the total dynamic activity of your life lets you be zero.

If everything becomes zero, does that mean there is nothing? No, light of the self sometimes appears in the realm of space and sometimes in the realm of time. Self is functioning every day in the realm of time, so there are many beings. That self is the whole universe: winter, little boys and girls, a kitchen pantry, or the main gate of a temple. That's why the kitchen pantry is light.

Even toilet paper is light of the self. Through using toilet paper with a warm heart, you can return to zero and learn who you really are. But if you become zero and then get hooked by zero, zero is no longer zero. So, whatever idea you have attached to, let it go and return to zero again and again. This is our practice.

The next three lines of the commentary are another saying from Yun Men:

Yun Men said, "You come and go by daylight; you distinguish people by daylight."

In daylight, the world of phenomena is visible, and you can distinguish everything very clearly. In darkness, you cannot make any distinctions. So in Zen Buddhism, darkness often represents truth, or the ultimate principle of existence. Sometimes we say "equality," because when you cannot distinguish things, everything becomes equal. Daylight and darkness seem to be completely separate, but we cannot separate them because they are dynamically interconnected.

According to the teaching of impermanence, the world of light, phenomena, and distinction constantly flows into the world of darkness, truth, and equality; darkness, truth, and equality constantly flow into light, distinction, and phenomena. So finally you have to go beyond ideas of distinction and equality and see their interconnection. Then equality can be seen in distinction, and distinction can be seen in equality. Seeing in that way is seeing from the universal perspective. "Daylight" means seeing the human world from the universal perspective. When you touch truth working deep in your own life, the whole world becomes bright, and you see people as they truly are.

It's very difficult for us to see people that way because we enjoy playing in the world of conceptualization so much that we get stuck there. For example, according to your conceptual understanding, a table is a table. But when you think in that way, you are already stuck because a table is something more than your concept of a table. If you break a table up and put it in the fireplace, it is wood fuel. If you sit on it, it's a chair. We cannot say what it is exactly because the table is constantly changing according to circumstances. The table can change because it is within the spiritual source, which is working dynamically. To express this, we say the table is a table as it truly is, or the table is thusness.

If you see a table as something more than your conceptual understanding and accept the table straightforwardly, the table is shining light. The table is very clear and bright because your ability to distinguish things as they truly are is functioning, not stuck. When you perceive the table as it truly is, you communicate with the table in the realm where the table and you are interconnected. Then wisdom lets you take best care of the table with your consciousness, with your body, and with your words. It's the same with seeing people. So if we want to see people as they really are and understand each other, let's see people by daylight.

"Suddenly it's midnight, and there's no sun, moon, or lamp-light."

In this line there is no light shining in the darkness of midnight, so you cannot see the truth. That means you are stuck. Maybe you have understood your life from the universal perspective, so you think now you are free to distinguish people of different races and cultural backgrounds in daylight. But watch out! The moment you start thinking in that way, you cut yourself off from your light by egoistic thinking. Your light starts to flicker, and truth is no longer bright for you. Then you don't see people as they really are; you see a flashing light called prejudice.

I always see my own prejudice like a little flashing light. I am a person who conveys Buddhist teaching based on peace and equality. So I always tell myself: Don't distinguish between people based on prejudice. Don't be critical toward people of different cultural backgrounds. Since I came to the United States, this has been my constant practice. Well, after twenty-five years, I am still practicing this.

When I see an American, I immediately see the flashing light that says, "Oh, you are American; you don't understand Buddhism." I confess. I cannot work out this flashing light. It's the same with my students. Even though they tell me, "Katagiri, you are a great teacher!" I don't believe them because still they say, "Oh, you are Japanese; I don't like Japanese."

If you see this subtle flashing light, you are stuck in conceptualization. But don't be afraid of the flashing light. You are a human being. As long as you have human consciousness, you see this flashing light. Without the consciousness that sees this flashing light, you cannot be a human being. So finally all I can do is accept myself as a human being. Then, right in the middle of seeing the flashing light of prejudice, I cannot stay stuck; I have to go beyond my prejudice and see people as they really are.

The more you attain enlightenment, the more you see yourself in the realm of that flashing light. The more you see it, the more you suffer. That's why the bodhisattva suffers. That's how bodhisattvas can understand human beings very deeply. So open your heart and accept that flashing light. Then walk side by side with all beings. Work hard every day to communicate with warmth and compassion. Very naturally your great capacity will manifest itself, and by its light you can see how the depth of your personality is cultivated.

"If it's someplace you've been to, then of course it's possible; in a place you have never been, can you even manage to get hold of something?"

Spiritual life is kind of like a realm, a place, a world. If you have been in that realm, even slightly, then it is possible for you to accept that such a place exists. But what about a place where you have never been? That place is also your life. So I think you should accept two places: a place where you have been and a place where you have never been. When you accept that there is a place where you have never been, your mind becomes open, magnanimous, and straightforward.

(Shih T'ou's) *Merging of Difference and Sameness* says,

Right within light there's darkness,
But don't see it as darkness:
Right within darkness there's light,
But don't meet it as light.

The *Merging of Difference and Unity* (*Sandokai*) is a poem composed in China by Zen master Sekito Kisen (Shitou Xiqian, 700–790). These four lines of the poem say that in the daylight world of distinc-

tion, you can understand that the world of equality is also there, but still you have to deal with everyday life wholeheartedly. That's pretty good for us. If you see the midnight world of equality, light is also there, so there is something more you have to do. Saying "don't meet it as light" means don't distinguish anything; go beyond any discriminating thought and just deal with light as it truly is.

Within light there is darkness, and within darkness there is light, so darkness and light are always together. That is oneness. That is a very important lesson, particularly in Zen Buddhism. Dogen Zenji said, "When one side appears, the other is in darkness." It's like a sheet of paper: when you use one side of the paper, the other side is simultaneously there. As a practical matter, it's not necessary to point out the other side. All you have to do is use this side and the other is already with you.

If you cut off light and darkness, tell me what is it? Thus it is said, "The mind flower emits light, shining on all the lands in the ten directions."

Going beyond any thought of light and dark, you can return to zero and just be alive. Maybe you are afraid to return to zero, but if you want to make your life deep, you have to practice this. To be a master mountain climber, a master football player, or a master painter, you have to do this. Whatever it is, if you don't return to zero and just do it, you cannot become a master of anything.

For example, if I say, "Just be kind to others without expecting anything," and you do it, but while you are doing it, you are constantly thinking, "I must just be kind without expecting anything," then a thought is still coming up. The real meaning of "just be kind" is that finally even this thought doesn't appear. That is no-thought, we say. There is nothing to say, just silence. This is the realm of spiritual life.

If you have never been in the realm of spiritual life, it is pretty mysterious for you. But when your spiritual life actually appears, there is no mystery. It is very clear because the mind flower is blooming. When a spiritual flower blooms, it emits light. This flower is your life; this light is the great capacity you already have. When your mind flower blooms, there is light shining on the whole world.

P'an Shan said, "Light isn't shining on objects, nor do the objects exist. Light and objects both forgotten, then what is this?"

When you see kindness as an object for you to attain, you have to tell yourself: just be kind. But if you go beyond even the thought of being kind, there is no object. If you don't see an object, very naturally there is no subject—your sense of individual self drops off. What's left? Just the state of being completely kind; your life is just the pure activity of kindness itself.

Also it was said,

This very seeing and hearing is not seeing and hearing—
But there's no other sound and form that can be offered to
you.

Here, if you can understand that there's nothing at all,
You are free to separate, or not, essence and action.

"This very seeing and hearing" is not your usual way of seeing and hearing; it is you and your object working together as one. "Essence" means the total, universal picture of your life. "Action" means the essence of your life is acting day to day. That is real acting. When you are really acting, you cannot say you are acting, and you cannot say you are not acting; the activity of the universe and

the activity of your life just become one action. Now the last paragraph of the commentary begins:

Just understand Yun Men's final statement thoroughly, then you can go back to the former one to roam at play. But ultimately, you do not make a living there. The ancient Vimalakirti said, "All things are established on a non-abiding basis."

In real action there is no opportunity for you to conceptualize anything. This is not pessimistic; it is full aliveness. That's why we have to train ourselves to go beyond thinking and deal with our great capacity as it truly is. From moment to moment, the lively energy of life is making your life alive—right now, right here! This time and place where your life exists is constantly changing. That is why Vimalakirti said that all things are established on a non-abiding basis. Even so, this is the time and place where you create a peaceful life.

You mustn't go here to play with lights and shadows and give play to your spirit. Nor will it do to make up an understanding in terms of nothingness.

When you feel something broad and magnanimous, the big world where our warm hearts communicate with each other, you could easily stop and play with your ideas about what you have experienced. But don't stop and play with those ideas: pass them by. If you get stuck in enlightenment, you separate your life from others' lives, and people won't accept you. Playing with spiritual life makes you a ghost; your life is up in the air. So whatever you experience, don't get stuck there. If you see the flashing lights of egoist thoughts, plant your foot on the ground and just keep going. Don't stay with anything; just go ahead. That is the Buddhist spirit. Then your life constantly deepens.

An Ancient said, "Better you should give rise to a view of existence as big as Mt. Sumeru, than that you produce a view of nothingness as small as a mustard seed."

You have understood the universal perspective. You have big ideas, and your heart is as big as Mount Sumeru. That's fine. When you understand nothingness, nothingness gives you great spiritual encouragement to keep going. But if you attach to the wonderful aliveness in your life, that attachment is like a mustard seed. Your understanding may be huge, but a subtle attachment is still there. That tiny seed is dangerous for you because it doesn't let you be free. If you don't notice it, you are always creating problems in the human world. So take care of this subtle attachment very carefully, and try to be free from it. Then that tiny seed also becomes a great encouragement to keep going.

People of the (lesser) two vehicles often fall onesidedly into this view.

You have a big head that wants to understand Buddha's teaching, so we have to talk about it. Then little by little you build up a kind of theoretical buddhology in your head. Maybe you think nirvana is the goal, something you can reach by obeying Buddha's teaching. But if you attach to such a goal, you are stuck in your concept of nirvana and you cannot move an inch. You cannot find a peaceful life that way because the peaceful life that you are seeking is not a concept. So your real goal is to be free from your goal. Whether you attain enlightenment or not doesn't matter. What matters is that you keep going. That's all we can do.

You create your world, your life. If you seek a peaceful life, you must be peaceful. Don't be critical. Don't judge yourself. Don't judge others. Just keep going. Finally you reach your real goal: the

place where your life is fully alive. Maybe you have never experienced the full aliveness of life, but if you feel something from this teaching, just move toward it. That is our effort.

Instead of taking care of our life according to our own ideas, we are learning to take care of all beings from a universal perspective. We pay attention to the real reality we live in and try to be present there. Having your own ideas is fine, but please open yourself; listen to your heart, others' hearts; and live together in peace. That is the point of Yun Men's teaching in the *Blue Cliff Record*.

Part Two

PRACTICE & ENLIGHTENMENT