

teisho d'Albert Low

Ungan's "The Whole Body is Hand and Eye"

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Introduction

When the entire body is the eye, while seeing you do not see. When the entire body is the ear, while hearing you do not hear. When the entire body is the mouth, while speaking you do not speak. When the entire body is the mind, when thinking you do not think.

Putting aside the entire body, if there are no eyes, how do you see? If there are no ears, how do you hear? If there is no mouth, how do you speak? If there is no mind, how do you think? If you can unfold a single pathway, you are a fellow student with the ancient Buddhas. However, putting studying aside for the moment, with whom should you study Zen?

Case

Ungan asked Dogo, "What use does the great Bodhisattva of Compassion make of all those hands and eyes?" Dogo said, "It is like a person straightening the pillow with outstretched hands in the middle of the night." Ungan said, "I have understood." Dogo said, "How do you understand?" Ungan said, "All over the whole body is hands and eyes." Dogo said, "You have had your say, but you have only given eight tenth of the truth." Ungan said, "How would you put it?" Dogo said, "Throughout the whole body is hands and eyes."

Verse

To say 'all over the body' is alright;
'Throughout the body' is well said.
If you take it conceptually,
You're a million miles away.
When the great Phoenix spreads its wings,
The clouds of six compounds vanish.
Its wing beats lash the seas of the four realms.
This is raising a speck of dust.
Much bleating but little wool.
Don't you see!

The net of jewels reflect each other!
 Where does the eye of the staff come from?
 I cry, "Tut! tut! »

General comments about koans

Before discussing the koan let us say something about koans in general. A koan is, one could say, a window on to the truth, or, if you prefer something more personal, on to our 'true nature.' Koans come straight out of the true nature of a master, a Patriarch or Buddha. Therefore to really enter into a koan we have to become the Zen master, the Patriarch or the Buddha; become one with him. As Mumon says in his commentary on the koan Mu, "One sees Joshu eyeball to eyeball." In so far as 'from the beginning all beings are Buddha' this is not difficult, to become one with Buddha is to return home. What is difficult is maintaining the illusion of separation and it is because we continue to uphold the illusion and search in reflections for the source of light that our practice is difficult. What is this true nature. The koans "Who am I?" (What is my face before my parents were born?), Joshu's Mu! and the Sound of One Hand Clapping are all addressed to this question.

Inherent to all koans is a contradiction, a bite, or what one might call a twist. This contradiction is the way into the koan. For example, if one is working on the koan 'Who am I?', the I who seeks is the I who is sought. In other words I is reflected back on to itself. And yet that which is sought as well as that which seeks is beyond all reflection. They are not two but one. This means that if one is working on a koan, then the first thing that one must do is to ask 'what is the contradiction? What is the point of leverage? How does one enter into this koan? So often people try to work with the koan Who am I in the same way that they would ask "What is two plus two?" or "Where did I leave the keys?" or "What is the time?" One of the ways in which one can arrive at the essence of a koan is by saying, we know this koan is talking about true nature; how does the koan give voice to that which, up till now, has had no voice? Knowing is all; but once we've said that, we've made something of knowing; made it something rather small, something among other things, an experience among other experiences. And if we repeat 'knowing is all', each time we do so the statement has less and less value. On the other hand, when one sees into a koan, which 'says' the same thing as 'knowing is all', then each time one takes the koan up again, it becomes richer and richer. Thus we might say that the basic contradiction is speaking without speaking, speaking without opening the mouth. "A non Buddhist asked Buddha, Please do not give me words, do not give me silence. What is the truth? »

The koan Mu is inexhaustible. In our tradition one sees into the koan Mu and then goes on to other koans in the Mumonkan and then on to the Hekiganroku and so on.. But every koan in the Mumonkan and in the Hekiganroku is a commentary on Mu. In fact the seventeen hundred koans are all commentaries on the koan Mu. Mu is inexhaustible in the same way that true nature is inexhaustible because Mu is true nature. And the bite of Mu, the twist of Mu comes with : if it is a dead word to say true nature is knowing,

why isn't it a dead word to say that Mu is true nature? How does Mu enable us to talk about true nature without talking about true nature?

Background to the Koan

This koan is one which is so appropriate to our day. One of the sad things about our civilization is that we have built cities which are not made for human beings. But a sadder story still is that we have made a universe that excludes human beings. Every age has its myth and ours is no exception. With a myth we try to explain the origin and meaning of the universe. Generally speaking, the myths of other civilizations have always found a central place for the human being. But according to our myth the world does not come from a creative act but from an accident. It is all without meaning. And, according to this same myth, the human being is just a by-product, a by-play of blind forces. The irony is that it is human beings who affirm this. We human beings have shut ourselves out into a universe that is mindless, cold and meaningless. And whether we are philosophers, scientists, or simply people who just get along as best we can, this chilling philosophy freezes us all to our marrow's.

The Great Bodhisattva of Compassion, who is the chief protagonist of our koan, had her origin with the beginning of the Prajna Paramita school. The Prajna Paramita school, as you know, was itself a revolt against another cold and dead interpretation that saw the world simply as a place to get out of as quickly as you could: life, in other words, was simply a process by which one suffered in order to escape from it. Monasteries were created where people incarcerated themselves in order to be able to do this with a minimum of distraction. Naturally many people would say that this is a poor picture of the Theravada or the Hinayana school. And indeed, the Theravada school, in its own way, is magnificent. But we human beings have to take everything to extremes and monks left the Middle Way to wander far into the ways of self and world abnegation. Just in the same way that we've done it today. Science in itself is a most glorious and wonderful creation of the human mind. But we have to constantly overstep our limits and blunder into areas where we've got no right to go; at least not as scientists or philosophers. Instead of saying, "How far can we get in studying human beings by assuming that they are simply patterns of behavior, or how far can we get if we assume that matter and energy are the only components of the Universe," we take the unwarranted and unscientific step of saying that behavior patterns are all, matter and energy is all there is.

One of the problems that came with the Theravada school was that Buddha became an extremely remote figure and the Arhat became the Olympic champion of the day. The Arhat was concerned with simply living through this last life so that he could get off the wheel of birth and death and so go on his way to extinction. The Prajna Paramita revolted against this cold, dead view of things. Originally it was the Prajna Paramita icon itself that was venerated but as this was too abstract, it broke down into two aspects. On the one hand was Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of wisdom; and on the other was the remarkable discovery of Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Many people have likened the Bodhisattva of Compassion to the Virgin Mary. And indeed, one can see many similarities; but also many differences. Kannon is often pictured as a graceful,

gentle, loving kind of person, She is also depicted with many hands and eyes. An example of the former is the Kannon that we have in the down stairs zendo, and an example of the latter is the Kannon in the dokusan room.

The Jesuits, when they went to Japan and China, were very upset by the armed and many eyed Kannon because they thought that the Buddhists were worshipping idols, demons. To them this depiction was grotesque. However in our age we are more used to nonrepresentational art and are no so affronted by it.

But what is this figure with many arms and many eyes? This is Ungan's question and it introduces us to a living and loving world.

Before we go into this, let us just recount a few mondo.

Mondo

There're two protagonists here; there's Dogo, the teacher and Ungan. First et us say a word or two about Dogo

Dogo's teacher said, "It's better not to speak where your wisdom does not reach." (That's a wonderful precept). And his teacher said, "If you do, then horns will sprout out of your head. What do you think?" And Dogo immediately left the room. What would you have done?

Someone asked Dogo "What is the place to apply effort in these times?" in other words what is the real work nowadays? What is real Zen work? And the reply, "If a thousand people call you and you do not turn your head, only then will you have some portion of attainment. »

One does not accept any acclaim, any admiration or attention. It's not that one does not accept it; that is not quite the right expression, but there is no one to receive it. "A thousand people calling one..." just imagine that you had a thousand people calling your name.

"If you do not turn your head, only then will you have some portion of attainment." On another occasion Ungan said, "There's a son of someone's family; when questioned, there's nothing he cannot explain." And someone asked Ungan, "How many scriptures were in his room?" Ungan said, "Not even a single word." "Then, how did he have such knowledge?" "Day and night he never slept." "Could I still ask him about something?" "If he could he would not say. »

Who is this one? What is this eye that never sleeps? What does it mean, 'day and night he never slept?' And how one does that get knowledge? Does it mean that knowledge was pouring in day and night? Or does it mean that not sleeping itself is what real wisdom is all about? This 'not sleeping' of course, has nothing to do with not going to bed. If we only slept when we're in bed, we'd be very well off.

Once when Ungan was making shoes he was asked by a monk, "If I came to you master and asked for eyes, I wonder, would I get them or not?" This question about asking for eyes, will lead us into our koan. What does it mean to have eyes? There was a master that was beating a monk and the monk turned around and said, "If your stick had an eye it would not beat me." What does that mean?

"If I came to you master and asked for eyes, I wonder, would I get them or not?" And the master asked, "Who did you give yours to?" It's a very clever question really but it's a very good answer. And the monk came back and said, "I haven't any." And the master said, "If you had, where would you put them?" The monk didn't know what to say. And Ungan went on and asked, "Is the one asking for eyes an eye or not?" And the monk said, "He is not an eye." and Ungan laughed at him.

Comments on the introduction

Before going on it might be as well to say a few words about the introduction as they provide an essential background against which to view the koan. The introduction starts by saying "When the entire body is the eye, while seeing you do not see." When the entire body is the eye... What body is this? This is really one of the points about this koan. If one's whole body is an eye it means to say that one is totally one with the seeing. We have the expression in English, 'I was all eyes.' "When she came into the room I was all eyes!" It means that I only had eyes for her - I was completely one with her alone.

But there's another body which is entirely the eye. For example when one looks at the world as it is at the moment, one can imagine it surrounded, engulfed by empty, chilling, dead space. But another way of seeing the world is possible which is entirely different. I'm not saying that we should make up another myth. But what I am saying is that we should open our eye. We laugh at the ancients because they were all so superstitious. We laugh at them because they animated the world. They animated trees and thought trees were alive. They animated rocks and worshipped them. They animated rivers and heard elfs chuckling. Everywhere, for the ancients, these foolish people, was life and laughter even though there was sometimes, indeed often, danger. But it was danger that came from another life form. This, of course, is foolishness as we now know. With our objectivity, we have turned everything into an object. We've turned God into an object, we've turned mind into an object, we've turned life into an object, D.N.A., R.N.A., nucleic acids and what not. Objects! Objects alone exist. Subjectivity is an unprovable postulate.

What is this other way of seeing. It is, "When the entire body is the eye (when the entire universe is the eye) while seeing you do not see." This is not the subjective world of the ancients nor the objective world of the moderns. When you are all eyes, there is no differentiation. "There is nothing that I hate", said Rinzai. There is no dirt in the world. "When the entire body is the ear, while hearing you do not hear." It's said that Avalokitesvara who was the original Bodhisattva of compassion came to awakening through hearing. At the moment of awakening Avalokitesvara was just sound. There is a

koan, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" The sound of one hand clapping is the sound of sounds. It's the light of lights. And when you hear the sound of sounds, you don't hear the sounds.

"The entire body is the mouth. While speaking you do not speak. When the entire body is the mind, when thinking you do not think."

This is the problem that the entire body is rarely the mind. What happens is the mind is focused on one thing or another and the entire body, the entire dharma body, is concentrated within that narrow focus.

When you're working on "Who am I?" you're working to awaken to the whole body as mind. But this is like the ass looking at a well. We're always in samadhi. Our true state is a state of samadhi. We never leave samadhi. The whole body is always the mind.

"Putting aside the entire body, if there are no eyes, how do you see?" This is the well looking at the ass.

Do you see with the eyes? If there are no ears, if there is no mouth, if there is no mind? What then? When did you ever use the eyes to see? When did you ever use the mouth to speak? Whenever did you use the ears to hear? You must look. We're not saying that looking in this way is the only way to look. But if you do look this way, if you do see that you don't speak with the mouth, you don't hear with the ears, you don't see with the eyes. Indeed there is no seeing, there is no hearing, there is no speaking or acting. The whole body is always the mind; see this and you can free yourself from the prison that you are stuck in.

"If you can unfold a single pathway you are a fellow student with the ancient Buddhas." What is that one way? In the Mumonkan there is a koan, #48, in which the questioner asks, "There are Buddhas in the ten directions, Bhagavats in the ten directions, but only one way to Nirvana. What is that way? »

What is that way? Do you think it's zazen? Do you think it's asking "Who am I?", "What is Mu?", following the breath? Do you think it is Zen? What is that one way? When you're working, you're working to unfold that one way. Unfold that single pathway.

"However, putting studying aside for the moment, with whom should you study Zen?" It is like the haiku says,

"No-one
walks this path
this autumn evening

The koan

Traditionally the Bodhisattva of Compassion is said to hear the cries of the world and with the hands and eyes responded to the suffering of the world. Instead of the Arhat whose aim was to move out of the cycle of birth and death, the Bodhisattva remains in the world to help the suffering. The vow of the Bodhisattva is that she will not go into

Nirvana until every single suffering being has entered Nirvana. One has to understand what this means. Our awakening is not a personal triumph. We do not have to win a spiritual sprint. We are one mind. Awakening is to penetrate more and more deeply into this truth. The world is alive. And as long as there is suffering then this living whole is shattered. Whether it is my suffering or the suffering of another, when seen from the perspective of the Bodhisattva makes no difference, because, seen from this perspective there is no 'me' or 'another.' In the Diamond Sutra, "Although the Bodhisattva saves all sentient beings, there are no sentient beings to save. »

Traditionally, the eyes and arms of the Bodhisattva were eyes and arms of compassion. And yet Dogo said, "It is like a person straightening the pillow with outstretched hands in the middle of the night." What has that got to do with the salvation of the world? What has that got to do with succoring others in their misery. This is the point on which this koan turns.

"It's like a person straightening the pillow with outstretched hands in the middle of the night. »

It has everything to do with the salvation of the world and succoring others in their suffering. We have an expression "as cold as charity". Charity at one time meant love; the kind of love in which you gave others when they needed it, where you helped others when they needed it. But helping others became a duty, a way of earning a ticket to heaven. Because it was a duty we performed for others who were so inept and incapable, so stupid that they could not do things for themselves. And out of our superiority, we brushed a few crumbs off the table for them to eat. This involved a separation. It was 'me' helping 'others.' When helping or loving others becomes a duty, becomes a way of salvation in itself, when loving others bestows merit, it then ceases to be the action of the Bodhisattva of Compassion. It simply becomes the action of a merchant buying and selling.

What is it like when you're in the middle of the night, you're comfortable, warm, but you wake up and to find you have got a crick in the neck and the pillow is all awry. You reach out and you straighten the pillow. Could you help someone with that same kind of self disinterest? Without any kind of separation between you, the pillow, the warmth, the sleep? Could you do that? So natural? So right? So necessary? So at one? One must enter into the complete ordinariness, the complete naturalness, the complete mindlessness of this act and then see it as the Bodhisattva of Compassion saving all sentient beings, with exactly the same naturalness, the same mindlessness, exactly the same spontaneity.

Ungan said, "I have understood" and Dogo said, "How do you understand?" And Ungan said, "All over the whole body is hands and eyes."
eighty percent right

Ungan said "All over the whole body is hands and eyes." Dogo said, "You have had your say, but you have only given eight tenth of the truth." Ungan said, "How would you put

it?" Dogo said, "Throughout the whole body is hands and eyes. "Why does Zen Master Dogo say to Ungan, "You're eighty percent right »

A mondo might help shed some light on this. A monk asks "How is it when the Dharmakaya is manifesting form in accordance with beings?" The Dharmakaya is wholeness, the whole body [kaya], the dharma body. It is the body of the master who said "my body is so big there is nowhere to put it." The Dharmakaya is one's own body. It is this that is revealed with the first kensho, provided it is a real kensho.

"How is it when the Dharmakaya is manifesting form in accordance with beings?" means what does the Dharmakaya look like as a form? And the answer is, "It's like the moon reflected in the water; like an ass looking at a well. »

"Like the moon reflected in the water..." Everything is the Dharmakaya manifesting form in accordance with beings: this computer, this table this window.... Everything is like the moon reflected in the water. It is like an ass looking at a well; if an ass looks at a well, all that the ass is going to see is himself; all that you ever know is yourself.

And then the master says, "You have said quite a lot but you've only said eighty percent. And the monk said, "Well what do you say master?" And the master said, "It's like the well looking at the ass. »

We are the Dharmakaya. How can the Dharmakaya be like the moon reflected on the water under any circumstances, whether it's manifesting form or not manifesting form? It is not the moon that is reflected in the water; it is the water reflecting the moon.

All over the body! And this body is the physical body. This is the person who is all arms, all eyes; who is one with the situation; totally one with the situation. But as Dogo says, this is not quite it. There's still another step. You're there but there's just another step. And he says, what is that step?

"Throughout the whole body is hands and eyes." With this there is just no situation. With this, it is not the Bodhisattva who is saving all sentient beings. It is the universe which is a universe of salvation. It is one world, a living loving world. It is one mind.

When we're working on ourselves, one often asks, what happens if I work all my life and never come to awakening? Our practice is not a practice we do in order to come to awakening. It is not even a practice to save all sentient beings. We practice because 'throughout the whole body is hands and eyes.'

There's a story that Shibayama told. It was about a dove that was flying and she look down and saw the whole forest was aflame. It was a blazing, roaring fire. Huge fire. And she saw all of the animals rushing around in panic, trying to get away from the fire. She flew and flew and eventually came to the ocean. She scooped a few drops of water on her back and then she flew back. She flew and flew until she came to this huge, roaring fire and she just sprinkled the few drops of water from her back onto the fire. And then she flew again and got more water, a few more drops and back again she went and again and again and again until eventually she was so exhausted she plunged into the fury of the fire.

You say, "What a waste! »

No! "Throughout the whole body is hands and eyes. »

The verse

"To say all over the body is alright.

Throughout the body also is well said.

If you take it conceptually,

you are a million miles away. »

If you take anything conceptually, you're a million miles away. The question, what happens if I work all my life and I don't come to awakening, is a question which is asked with the mind. It's not a question that's asked with the heart.

"When the great giant Phoenix spreads it's wings, the clouds of six compounds vanish. The six compounds of course, are the six senses, and the great giant Phoenix, the mystic bird of rejuvenation, was reputed, with one flap of his wings, to fly ninety thousand miles. This great Phoenix is a metaphor for the true mind, the opened eye. Just one blink of the eye, and the dust of the six compounds vanish. It's enough just to wake up; this is enough just wake up.

The verse goes on to say,

when its wing beats lash the seas of the four realms,

this is raising a speck of dust.

Note well it says a "A speck of dust," not "A drop of water!" The whole oceans of the world lashed by the wing beat of the Phoenix raises but a speck of dust. There's a koan in which it says, "I take the universe as a grain of rice between my finger and my thumb and flick it away." When we see the world as an object we are crushed by its vast immensity, when the entire body is the eye, the world is but a speck of dust, no not even so much!

"All of this is much bleating but little wool." Bleating, of course is the sound that sheep and lambs make. Much ado about noting

Don't you see!

The net of jewels reflect each other!

Where does the eye of the staff come from?

I cry, "Tut! tut! »

The net of jewels is Indra's net and the jewels are the crystal balls that are at each interstice, each cross over, of the net. Just imagine a net spreading right throughout space as far as the eye can see and further. It's three dimensional. And where the strings of the net cross, a crystal ball is placed. And each ball is reflecting all the other balls and is reflected by the other balls and is reflecting this reflection.

Throughout the universe is just hands and eyes. Each is what one is, each one is oneself. Each one is the universe. Each one is reflected throughout the universe. The whole universe is reflected by oneself. This way of seeing the world in which each being, each sentient being and this means ants and fleas and bugs and bees is a crystal ball, and each crystal ball, each bug, each bee, is the whole and reflects the whole. This view that life is the world; the world is life. The entire body is hands and eyes. As Christ said Each is the way, the truth and the life.

When you're practicing, you strive hard. You're driven by pain and it's natural that one wants to find some way by which one would no longer suffer. But as long as you do that, as long as that is the way that you're practicing, your practice is the practice of the Arhat. Don't ever let the question come in your mind, "What happens if I practice all my life and never come to awakening?" All that matters is the practice you're doing right here and now. Do that well and you'll see that "All over the whole body is hands and eyes. Throughout the whole body is hands and eyes."