

Family Treasure

Good morning! We're happy to be with you at this joint practice day of the Baltimore Shambhala Center and Clare Sangha. Our collaboration goes back some years now. You first invited us to a practice day in 1998. Since then, some of you have attended our seasonal retreats, and our joint practice day last year.

Allow me to recount a debt of gratitude I'm carrying these 29 years. It is for the initial meditation training received at the Dharmadatu – Shambhala Center in Washington, DC. I'll always be grateful for the dedicated instructors who taught me there, and for the books they introduced me to, including Meditation in Action by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Zen Mind, Beginners Mind by Shunryu Suzuki.

And I am grateful for the wisdom of the practice learned then. It is the basic *shamatha* practice, peaceful abiding in breath awareness. Breath awareness helps us to look inward and let go. Shamatha practice facilitates Zen training that is directed to silent inquiry and self-emptying.

* * *

I have a pop quiz for you today. There is only one question; it's not an easy one. *How long should a man's leg be?* A student told me it should be as long as the other leg! Not a bad answer, but it's not the answer given by the famous person who asked this question. Any ideas?

The answer is: *a man's leg should be long enough to reach the ground.* Do you know who said that? President Abraham Lincoln said that.

I like the statement because when our legs are long enough to reach the ground, we're always standing on our path. It is right beneath our feet. When we feel our feet on the ground, we are in our body and directly connected with the path. The path is not behind us – though we want to know the lessons of our experience. And it's not ahead of us – though we need to make plans in this world. Both our planning and the lessons of experience arise and are included within the path today.

* * *

When asked about her experience of meditation, **Sharon Salzberg** of the Insight Meditation Society gave illuminating answers. She said:

“The experience of meditation is one of the most healing things we can do.

“One thing meditation has taught me that I would like to share with all people is: we have greater capacities than we can imagine;

“The most profound way in which meditation has changed my life is that it has changed my view of who I am.” When asked about this change, she answered: “I went from confusion to clarity.”

For Salzberg, these words sum up her experience: meditation is healing; it convinced her of great capacities; it clarified her view of who she is. How is it that meditation can lead to such powerful and encouraging experience?

In Clare Sangha, students often mention a feature of meditation experience that encourages our practice as well. When we practice together for longer periods of time – such as in a day of silence or a seasonal retreat – we sense the falling away of barriers between ourselves and others. The walls just come down when we practice zazen or shamatha together. We don't have to take the walls down. There's no need to push them over or pull them down. No chisels, pulleys or sledge hammers are required.

All we need is silence and to be present. From the power of practice comes a sense of oneness, of relating, of simplicity. A friend once described it as the joy of freedom and support altogether.

If we're a little curious, we can ask what's behind such a falling away of barriers and walls, the feeling of it? How can this be? Is this the same power of which Sharon Salzberg speaks?

There's a handy two word answer to such questions: *family treasure*. Seekers in all the spiritual traditions speak of this family treasure. (Sometimes it is called the *family secret or family style*). To illustrate, let's look into a few teachings about our family treasure. When a teaching comes through to us fine and strong – in clarifying or ringing true with our experience – it invites us to make it our own.

* * *

The Christian mystic **Jean Pierre de Caussade** said this about family treasure: “What is the secret of finding the treasure? There isn't one. The treasure is everywhere. It is offered to us at every moment and wherever we find ourselves. All creatures and families, friends or enemies, pour it out abundantly, and it courses through every fiber of our body and soul...and reaches the very core of our being...We couldn't choose a better, more miraculous...way than the simple use of the means offered us by God.”

We draw on our family treasure by living what Caussade calls the “sacrament of the present moment.”

The great Sufi mystic of Islam, **Rumi**, spoke of it as follows:

“Don't worry if you're not famous; God knows best and hides his servants like a treasure, for *their security* and in places that are *little known*. Would you put your treasure where any fool could discover it?”

Rumi continues: “The love of God is a fire that consumes all difficulties. You are loved by Him; look for the reply in the same place the question comes from: *The cornerless corner of the heart is the royal road to God: the radiance that is neither East nor West comes from a single moon.*”

And Rumi asks “How can I - or anyone else - ever cease being astounded that He whom nothing can contain is contained in the heart?”

In Jewish tradition, the great **Rabbi Bunam** of Eastern Europe would tell those who came to him for the first time the story of Rabbi Eizik, son of Rabbi Yekel of Cracow:

After years of poverty, Rabbi Eizik dreamed that someone bade him look for a treasure in Prague, under the bridge that leads to the king's palace. The dream recurred twice, so Rabbi Eizik prepared for the long journey, and set out for Prague.

But he found the bridge was guarded day and night, so he dared not start digging. Still, he went to the bridge every morning, walking around it until nightfall.

Finally, the captain of the guards, who had been watching him, kindly asked if he was looking for something or waiting for somebody. Rabbi Eizik told him of the dream that brought him from faraway.

At this, the captain laughed: “And so to please a dream, you, poor fellow, wore out your shoes to come here?”

The captain went on to say “As for having faith in dreams, if I had had it, I should have had to get going when a dream once told me to go to Cracow and dig for treasure under the stove in the house of a Jew.

“Eizik, son of Yekel, that was the name. Eizik son of Yekel! I can just imagine what it would be like, how I should have to try every house over there, where one half of the Jews are named Eizik and the other half Yekel!” And the captain laughed again.

At this, Rabbi Eizik bowed and traveled home. He found and dug up the treasure from under his own stove. And he went on to build the House of Prayer that is called Reb Eizik–Reb Yekel's *Shul*.”

“Take this story to heart,” Rabbi Bunam would say to those who came to him, “and make what it says your own. There is something you cannot find anywhere in the world, not even at the Rabbi's. There is, nevertheless, a place where you can find it. It is a great treasure, which may be called the *fulfillment of existence*. But it can only be found in one place.”

* * *

The founder of Shambhala, **Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche**, called this family treasure our *basic goodness*. Zen names for it include *true nature* or *Buddha nature*, among others. The Zen tradition is typically brief and aphoristic in alluding to it. “If it comes through the gate it's not family treasure.” Or “it is hidden deep but ever present!”

In his General Recommendation of Zazen, **Dogen Zenji** speaks of the “treasure chamber.” What is the treasure chamber, you may ask?

Valerie Forstman, a teacher at **Ruben Habito's** Maria Kannon Zen Center, writes of this in her article, *Zen Practice and Music*:

“In relating Zen practice to music, two koans come to mind, both from Dogen’s *Fukan Zazengi* (General Recommendation of Zazen), that have especially offered direction in my daily practice as a musician. First, ‘the treasure chamber opens by itself, and one uses the treasure at will.’

“The treasure chamber is the present moment. All that we need is available here and now, offered freely for our taking; just as we are entirely free in the present moment to be ourselves. In other language, this is called grace. For me, it is an invitation to experience God’s immediacy – or the vast and specific dharma – as a vibrating presence in all things.

“As a musician, I am all too familiar with the weight of past successes and failures, and anxiety about future opportunities and outcomes hanging on my flute each time I pick it up. The treasure chamber is open and, to step into it, I must leave that thinking at the door. My freedom lies in preparing for a concert or audition simply to play at that moment, with no thought of what it might lead to. This is “attention,” a quality of being we cultivate as we sit here on our cushions, following our breath.

“The second koan is: “If there is a hairsbreadth of difference, it is the difference between heaven and earth. The difference is a concept. In performance, this ‘difference’ is manifest in the activity of judgment and fear (with being *outside myself* a prerequisite), or the direct experience of attachment to an idea of what I am doing...

“Truly, in the moment of creating a musical sound, I do not exist apart from that sound and that sound makes my existence possible. I play the sound; the sound plays me: hearer and heard are one.”

* * *

Mr Yamada-roshi – ancestral teacher of my first Zen teacher **Sr. Elaine MacInnes** – called the family treasure our *essential nature*. As Yamada, MacInnes encouraged students wanting to deepen their practice to experience and clarify this for themselves. Both aimed to help students bring forth the *prajna power* of essential nature into their daily life. I think this power is what Sharon Salzberg means by “greater capacities than we can imagine.” The Zen tradition calls this the *Way of wisdom and compassion*; it includes knowing what to do as well as what not to do.

Seeing one’s essential nature is seemingly no big feat. It’s simply recognizing what has been with you from the start. It’s not something outside you, but within that you are using constantly. With the family treasure ever at hand, there is ample opportunity for realization experience.

But, it is taught of old that, from the beginningless past, a karmic sickness has built a nest in the field of the eighth consciousness. And since it is a

matter of breaking through this nest, including ego-consciousness, realizing one's self nature is not so easy. (Regarding the eight classes of consciousness, see Chapter 10, Zen Vocabulary, in The Three Pillars of Zen, by **Philip Kapleau**.)

John Daido Looi-roshi of the Zen Mountain Monastery was akin to Yamada and MacInnes in his encouragement that students taste the tea for themselves. These Masters avoided the shopworn, dualistic debate in Zen of gradual v. sudden insight, simply noting the value of direct personal experience.

In this, Daido Looi-roshi taught that the experience of *yoriki* (concentration power) and *samadhi* (absorption in non-dual awareness) is the beginning of *body and mind falling away*, of *forgetting the self* – two of Dogen's expressions for realizing self-nature. The key is to build a strong foundation in practice.

If one wishes to deepen practice via direct experience, the Zen tradition offers the option of expanding from the harmonizing practice of *zazen*, or *shikan taza*, to the questioning practice of koan study. Koans are one of the *upayas* or skillful means of Zen training.

* * *

Let me close by simply expressing gratitude for our shared practice of *zazen* and *shamatha*. Silence has no tradition. We don't have to fiddle with our practice to make it work, we were born with all we need. If we just let the practice work as it has from remote antiquity – for more than 2500 years through the lineage of our ancestral teachers – it shows us the way to this wondrous family treasure that we share most intimately. This is the truly transformative element of Zen practice and training.

Alright then, that's more than enough talk from me. By all means, let's take care of our family treasure this day. Let's carry it lightly throughout our time together, then safely home tonight. Thanks for your attention.

Given By: Bruce Seiryu Blackman, Clare Sangha
Baltimore Shambhala Center, June 27, 2009