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"With My Zen Mind"
Calligraphy by Roshi Keido Fukushima

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With My Zen Mind

For years I have noticed that whenever Roshi Fukushima writes me a letter, he always signs it with the statement, "With my Zen mind." Every time I read that signature statement, it forces me to examine my own state of mind. I cannot help but focus on my "contaminated mind," overloaded with ego, attachments, and distractions. Once during a family discussion, one of my daughters remarked, "I like you more when you return from Tofukuji." When I probed further, she explained that then I was more agreeable, less prone to losing my temper, and pleasant to be with. Her statement is a constant reminder for me to continue to examine the state of my mind. No wonder the first line of the *Dhammapada* reads, "You are the result of what you have thought."

So what is the state of mind of Roshi Keido Fukushima? When I posed this question to the Zen master, I knew that we had a long discussion at hand. He began by suggesting that perhaps we could focus our conversation on the condition of his mind "before *satori*" and "after *satori*." That seemed to be a good place to start the discussion which was to take us on a long journey of exploration into his Zen life. "I have always tried to follow the Buddhist *dharma*. But before my *satori* experience, now I can say, my life was a life lived with ego. After the *satori* experience, I have no ego. This has brought a new *freedom* in my life." As we probed further, he explained that before *satori* he was attached to *dharma*. The monastic rules seemed difficult, though he believed in them and tried to follow them. However, there was "no joy" in keeping them. They were part of a daily routine. Intellectually he understood their function and the necessity to follow them, but emotionally they brought no satis-

faction. After *satori* experience however, everything changed. In his Zen mind, he now feels that he has risen above the dualism of the *dharma*. In order to explain this further, he began to make a distinction between "freedom from" and "freedom to." Before *satori*, there is a tendency to think that one should be "free from" various attachments (including the attachment to the *dharma*). After the *satori* experience, one is "free to" act without attachment and non-attachment. For Roshi Fukushima, this is a new freedom that Zen experience brings. In Japanese Zen, it is explained with the notion of *ji yu*, meaning "to depend on myself." However, this self-dependence is without ego.

The Zen mind is also "spontaneous mind." Before *satori* experience, as the Zen master explains, "The mind is attached to so many things that it loses its ability to act freely in the *present*. That means that the mind is not in its natural state. It is in the defiled state." As it turns out, the master holds that without the Zen experience, people are preoccupied with so many things that they cannot live fully. If we analyze this condition we will discover that most of us either live in the past or in the future. As a consequence, we negate the present. Being in the past means that we worry about the mistakes we have committed that produced our current miserable condition. Living in the future means that we plan ahead for things that will give us joy. Zen wants us to see that the "present" is the real moment. The present is the past of tomorrow and the future of yesterday. So, why not live in the present? I once asked a psychologist what was the secret of joy? "To look for the joy you already have," he responded, "rather than to try to find it in the future." I thought that was a Zen-like answer. It all boils down to the problem of suffering. Living in the past or future is a symptom of anxiety. For Zen, spontaneous mind is an anxiety-free mind.

I told the Zen master that Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen master, has popularized the phrase, "washing dishes for the sake of washing dishes."[13] What he means by this is that when

[13] Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), p. 3.

you are washing dishes, you should be totally there in the present. You should not be washing dishes in order that you may later enjoy a cup of coffee. Through this answer, Thich Nhat Hanh wants to bring into focus the importance of being in the present. I have often asked my students about the cause of their boredom. I think one of the causes of boredom is that we cannot cope with the reality of the present. We want to change our circumstances in order that we may be happy in the future. Boredom is the manifestation of "reality unrelatedness" caused by the negation of the moment. Roshi Keido Fukushima agrees that Thich Nhat Hanh is putting his finger on the Zen understanding of life.

Fukushima explains that in the Zen tradition, the importance of the moment is best described by such statements as, "When I eat, I eat; when I sleep, I sleep." He explicates by stating that when most people eat, they are not totally there. Their minds are elsewhere. Likewise when they sleep, they are not completely committed to sleeping. Their minds are restless. I asked the Zen master what he thought of the people who are often seen reading a book or a magazine while eating a meal. "That's funny," he said. "They can neither enjoy eating nor reading." Sometimes people do that to avoid interacting with their immediate environment because they are too self-conscious. Granted that sometimes reading while eating might be unavoidable, but as a habit it is symptomatic of "moment negation." The Zen master spoke of "mindfulness" as one of the tenets of his Zen mind. As a Buddhist ideal, mindfulness means to be fully aware of every moment of your existence. A mind which is preoccupied with many attachments cannot be "totally there." As a Zen master, Keido Fukushima is mindful of every moment of his life. "I enjoy my day to the fullest," he says, "because I am fully aware from the moment I get up until I go to sleep." How does he cope with distractions, I probed? With a laugh he responded, "I am fully aware of the distractions."

In March 2002, the Roshi visited the College of Wooster for a series of lectures and a meditation session. I asked him to

come to my house to have a look at a Zen rock garden that some of my students and I had constructed in my backyard. He was delighted to come and said, "I should give a name to your garden." As the students gathered, Keido Fukushima observed the garden, made some suggestions for improvement, and then proclaimed that he had a name for the garden. We anxiously awaited his announcement. The name he gave was "The Zen Mind." We talked about the symbolism of the rocks, the pine trees, and the gravel associated with the garden. We also discussed the meaning of the ripples created in the gravel by drawing circles around one rock. This was a perfect artistic manifestation of the state of the mind. When a thought enters our consciousness, it creates circles of ripples as the mind tries to deal with it. It is like throwing a pebble in a pond. It creates multiple circles which ultimately dissipate and the water returns to its original calm. In Zen, the state of mind is like that. One can purify the consciousness through meditation, or leave it to create ripple after ripple. The Zen mind is a stable mind. It is a peaceful mind. It is an unperturbed mind. It is an enlightened mind. This is the mind that the Buddhist tradition affirms the Buddha had. Since a Zen master is a living Buddha, Keido Fukushima possesses such a mind as manifested through his behavior.

I once asked the Roshi if his mind was like the mind of a *yogi* in the Hindu tradition. As we began talking, I mentioned to him that in *Sankhya-yoga*, the mind was classified in a variety of ways. It spoke of (1) forgetful mind, (2) distracted mind, (3) occasionally steady mind, and (4) concentrated mind.[14] The goal in *yoga* is to develop a concentrated mind which leads to the experience of *samadhi* (union with Reality). The Zen master responded by saying that he did not know the Hindu tradition that well, but the way *yoga* described the classification of the

[14] Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), ch. 2.

mind made sense to him. I wondered if the *samadhi* experience was similar to that of *satori*. I concluded that these two experiences may be similar, but not the same. In the Hindu tradition, reality is spoken of as Brahman, which can manifest as a personal deity like Krishna. In Zen, there is no such deity. Thus the experience of *satori* is explained as the experience of *shunyata* (emptiness). The Roshi felt that while it was all right to engage in academic discussions, what was essential was the experience. If the Hindu tradition recognized the necessity of the purification of the mind (which it does), then it was based on some *yogi*'s experiences. For the Zen master, this is the key. He did not know if his experience of *satori* was like the *yogi*'s experience of *samadhi*. It did not matter. What mattered was the kind of life both the *yogi*s and the Zen masters lived. He did want to know if the *yogi*s perceived the world as *maya* (temporary reality) and wanted to escape from it. As for him, the Zen mind was a fully engaged mind.

The Zen master asked me if I knew of the famous cow-herding pictures.[15] I had used these pictures in my class on Zen to illustrate a point about the Zen mind. He began to explain the meaning of this famous painting. The painting is a series of frames in which a man is depicted with a bull. In one frame, the bull is out of control and the man has difficulty taming it. In another frame, the man is able to catch the bull by its horns and tries to subdue it. Through a series of encounters with the bull, finally the man is able to tame the bull and ride it. As to be expected, the bull is the symbol for the mind. The painting shows the difficulty of taming the mind, bringing it under one's control, and finally experiencing the tranquility of repose.

Keido Fukushima pointed out the difficulties involved in taming his own mind when he was in the monastery. We have already discussed his attachment to his rational mind that led

[15] Paul Reps, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 136-150.

his guru to ask him to "become a fool." He talked about how, during the meditation, his mind would wander. Sometimes he would hear the sound of a train and could not keep it out of his mind. He wanted to board the train and return home, leaving the monastery behind. He mentioned how in the Chinese and Japanese traditions, the mind is compared to a monkey; it wants to constantly jump from one tree to another. He knows what his training monks are going through as they practice the Zen discipline. He also knows that purifying the mind through hard practice is an absolute necessity for a meaningful Zen life.

Roshi Keido Fukushima classifies the Zen mind into two categories: shallow and deep. Once, our conversation involved a discussion regarding certain Zen priests and Zen masters who had succumbed to temptations, which had created public scandals. We talked about how no religious tradition was free from such problems. As long as the religious leaders are human, they are subject to human frailties. I asked the Roshi how that was possible in Zen, since the Zen master is supposed to rise above ordinary consciousness. He answered by saying that the Zen mind can remain shallow if one does not continue to grow in Zen experience. Does that mean that even a Zen master, after the *satori* experience, can fall from grace? "Yes," said the Zen master, "if the *satori* experience is not sustained by constant practice, one can lose it." He then began to reflect on the "deep" Zen mind. He believes that a Zen master must deepen his Zen mind by constant practice. He regrets that some Zen sects are shortening the Zen training for priests because they need to place them in various temples that are without priests. This is also true in the case of appointing a Zen master. In the Rinzai sect, it is expected that after completing the *koan* study, a monk will spend twenty years in further training. Fukushima believes that if this training is shortened, it will produce "incomplete" masters. Such Zen masters have "shallow" Zen mind. He is satisfied that since taking charge of Tofukuji as the Zen master and the head abbot, he has trained priests with "deep" Zen mind. So far none of them have succumbed to temptations

involving sex or money. Speaking of his own Zen mind, he remarks, "I still practice hard."

In Japanese Zen, the heart of Zen is described as *mushin*. This word is usually translated as "no-mind" or "empty mind." For Keido Fukushima, such translations are misleading. He repeats the incident when Prince Charles visited Tofukuji in 1986. Seeing some monks practicing, the Prince had remarked that they were emptying their minds. At that occasion, the Zen master told Charles that Zen believed in *mushin*. He further explicated that *mushin* (no-mind) actually meant "free mind, fresh mind, and creative mind." Through such an understanding, Roshi Fukushima wants to emphasize the positive side of Zen mind. By calling it a fresh and creative mind, he wants to explain that the Zen mind is fully engaged in the world's activities. His own life is a good example of such a mind. Through his involvement in keeping Zen alive, both in the East and the West (his tours in China and the United States), he keeps incredibly busy with his sect's affairs, training monks, doing calligraphy, meeting visitors, and giving numerous lectures and talks. When I asked him about his hectic schedule, he responded by saying, "Zen is not simply about *zazen*. All of life is meditation." One day I inquired in the monastery if I could see the Roshi. I was told that he was at a local pottery shop, individually adorning 3,000 ceramic cups before they could be fired. What had started as a small project had become a huge one. Since these cups with his calligraphy of *mu* (no-ego) were to go to different friends, he made sure that this job was done well.

Zen mind is a simple mind. In this mind, there is a childlike innocence. In India there is a saying which goes something like this: the deeper the river, the less noise it makes; the shallower the stream, the more noise it makes. What is suggested here is that a person of depth has a certain quiet innocence about him/her. On the other hand, a shallow personality is more *childish* than *childlike*. From where does this simplicity stem? Religiously speaking, when people encounter something other than themselves, they stand in awe and wonder in the presence

of something higher and beyond. Zen simplicity is a consequence of encountering the Buddha nature. As D. T. Suzuki has pointed out, the experience of *satori* brings a certain sense of passivity and the sense of the Beyond.[16] The sense of humility, simplicity, and childlikeness are manifestations of a deep encounter with the Real. With the loss of ego, one becomes a conduit of peace and tranquility. When I first met the Zen master as a monk in Claremont, I discovered that he was different from others. At that time I did not connect his childlikeness with Zen. Most recently, having observed him as a Roshi and spent time with him, I am convinced that his simplicity goes beyond being a personality trait. It is connected with his religious experience. It is difficult to describe this behavior in words, but I will try. Once during his lecture session, a student asked him how he used his *nyoi* (small Zen stick). The Zen master demonstrated by hitting his assistant. Later on that evening while we were riding together in my car, he burst out laughing and yelled, "Today I am happy because I got to hit my assistant with my *nyoi*." One would not expect a religious heavyweight to express his emotions in such a manner. However, for Keido Fukushima, it seemed a fitting and innocent thing to do. Zen literature is full of stories of Zen masters depicting unusual behavior. Their acts of spontaneity are expressions of their Zen mind.

The Zen mind is full of joy. Several of my students who have had some encounters with Keido Fukushima have commented to me: "He is full of joy. He is so happy. He seems genuine and peaceful." I then ask a rhetorical question, "Why are not we as joyful as he is?" A strange silence pervades the classroom until someone dares to say, "He is enlightened, and we are not." Needless to say, this presents an excellent opportunity for a meaningful discussion on the nature of Zen life. Zen joy is not a manifestation of being funny by telling jokes (although Roshi Fukushima is good at telling jokes also). It is a manifestation of

[16] D. T. Suzuki, *ibid.*, pp. 103-106.

a deep contentment, which comes from encountering the Real. It is acceptance of life as perceived beyond all dualism. More than once I have heard Roshi Keido Fukushima say, "My life is full of joy." I have concluded that he is joyful because his mind is at peace. Having quenched his cravings, extinguished his ego, and relinquished attachments, he is able to transcend the psychological suffering that torments an average person. I once asked him, "Do you ever suffer from physical pain?" With a laugh he responded, "Of course, but for me every day is a fine day." For the Zen mind, joy can be experienced despite pain.

Zen mind is a compassionate mind. It is well known that Buddhism strongly emphasizes *metta* (love) and *karuna* (compassion). Buddha taught that compassion should be exercised towards all beings, not just human beings. As a teaching, it is marvelous, but how does it function in one's life? In Zen, *karuna* is almost a physiological experience. Keido Fukushima explains it in the following manner. During the Zen training, the monks are encouraged to become *mu* (no-self). Of course, becoming *mu* involves transcending the ego. When the ego is gone, the vacuum that is created is automatically filled with compassion. I call it a physiological experience because it appears that the Zen monk *feels* the compassion naturally. He does not try to practice compassion; he cannot help but be compassionate. It is as if the Real is compassionate, and the taste of the Real is the taste of compassion.

During my stay at Tofukuji, I had many opportunities to converse with the resident monks. Once when I asked a monk to describe his feelings for the Zen master, he simply stated, "He is compassionate." When I persisted that, during the *koan* study, the master seemed quite stern and sometimes annoyed, I was told that this was "one sign of his compassion." There seems to be an intricate bond between the training monks and Keido Fukushima. The foreign visitors who have spent some time at Tofukuji also testify to his loving and compassionate nature. His work in China and the United States is an expression of his deep love for suffering humanity. As an embodiment of *karuna*, he has touched many lives.